

## Solidarity

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/18560512) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/18560512>.

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| Rating:          | <a href="#">Explicit</a>  |
| Archive Warning: | <a href="#">Graphic Depictions Of Violence</a>  |
| Category:        | <a href="#">M/M</a>   |
| Fandom:          | <a href="#">Sonic the Hedgehog (Video Games)</a>  |
| Relationship:    | <a href="#">Shadow the Hedgehog/Sonic the Hedgehog</a>  |
| Additional Tags: | <a href="#">Drama</a> , <a href="#">Action/Adventure</a> , <a href="#">Porn</a> , <a href="#">Smut</a> , <a href="#">Sex</a> , <a href="#">Blood and Violence</a> , <a href="#">Probably more so than the last two</a> , <a href="#">Romance</a> , <a href="#">Plot With Porn</a> |
| Series:          | Part 3 of <a href="#">Harmony, Unity, and Solidarity</a>  |
| Stats:           | Published: 2019-04-22 Updated: 2019-06-24 Chapters: 27/? Words: 118859  |

## Solidarity

by [St4rDustSp33dW4y](#)

### Summary

Please, you need to be 18+ to read and interact with me. Thank you.

This is the third part in the Harmony, Unity, & Solidarity series. If you haven't read the first two, do so before reading this one.

This story takes place eight years later. I really don't want to give too much away in the description, but I will say that it's loosely based off Sonic Forces.

## Eight Years Later



### Chapter One: Eight Years Later

*This world was devastated before I was born.*

*A harsh bleak place, where we live in eternal boredom.*

*Life is a struggle, and kids live without hope.*

*How did this happen?*

*No one will answer me directly.*

*But they always point to the clock.*

The bell finally, finally rings the moment Silver writes the last line on his notebook paper and he quickly stuffs his belongings into his backpack. He slings it over his shoulder and tries to rush out the door with the other kids, but is stopped by his teacher.

*Oh no.*

“Not so fast, Silver,” Mrs. Labyrinth states as she looks up at the hedgehog who is about to jet out of the classroom from over her glasses. She mainly uses them for reading, but no one knows why she even bothers wearing them since they seem like they’re two times smaller than her face and she

always leans her head down to look over them in an intimidating manner. She's an older woman with hair so white that it's almost blue and the kids of the playground know her only as the Tidal Tempest. Her name given to her by the oceans of homework she gives her students each night. Silver's dad has successfully wooed all of his teachers up until this point to bail him out of such situations, but this gale seems to be one storm he's yet been able to tame.

Silver straightens his posture and makes his way back to her desk, "Y-yes, Tidal—I uh... mean, Mrs. Labyrinth?"

She quirks one of her penciled eyebrows up at him at the informality of his words, but doesn't question his slip up. No, she probably has more pressing matters to discuss with him. "It's about the book report you handed in last week," she pulls the paper out of the drawer of the desk and places her glasses back onto her face just long enough to read the title, "*Tales from the Arabian Nights*?"

"Oh, yes," Silver nods to her as his face brightens up, "I love the action, adventure, and suspense! Especially the part where Sinbad...!"

"You're not old enough to be reading this yet," Mrs. Labyrinth states bitterly as she slams the piece of paper onto the desk.

Silver's face drops a little and questions, "Wh-what?" He gets into a more confident posture before walking in front of her desk, "With all due respect, Mrs. Labyrinth, my dad has been reading me these stories since before I could even *talk*. I know them inside and out."

"What grade are you in?" She questions impatiently.

Silver opens his mouth, but his face falls a little when he says, "Second grade."

"...And how old are you?"

Silver shrinks in on himself a little more, "I just turned eight, ma'am."

"This book is meant to be read from grades 3-5. It's much too advance for you to properly grasp," the teacher explains with a dismissive tone before sliding it across her desk, "I want you to re-write it..."

"But I worked *hard* on that," Silver tries to protest.

"Doubtfully," the teacher gets to her feet and looks down at the small hedgehog, "You say your father has been reading this to you all your life. I'm wagering *he* wrote this for you."

Silver stifles his laughter because Sonic doing any kind of homework was a joke in itself, but he shakes his head to push those thoughts away because now wasn't the time nor the place. He stands with his legs together and his arms folded politely behind his back as he tries one more attempt to convince her otherwise. "Please," Silver's voice has a hint of a beg, but it's firm and unmoving, "At least read what I've had to say about it. If there is any doubt in your mind that I haven't accurately conveyed the meaning, I will rewrite it. Just *please*, give me a chance."

Her eyes are sharp like daggers on him before she sighs as if reading over the assignment is the biggest burden on the planet. She lifts the paper up and secures her glasses back onto her face.

Silver's face relaxes with relief when he sees her reading it and his smile grows more and more with each paragraph she reads, but it falls when she lets the paper flutter back down onto the desk and shakes her head. "At least tell me what I've gotten wrong," Silver pleads with her.

Mrs. Labyrinth plucks out one of her many red pens from her holders and pops open the cap with one hand like she's done this before thousands of times. She gashes out an entire sentence. Then, circling every little grammar error and misplaced apostrophe until it's just a mess of red.

Silver deflates a little with a look of utter shock and horror. He worked so hard on that and it's all scribbled out and circled into illegibility. The thing that is legible is her note at the top that states that the assignment needs to be redone and signed by a parent or guardian.

Mrs. Labyrinth drops it into his hands and simply states, "It must be on my desk before Friday or it'll be marked as an incomplete."

Silver feels his fingers slowly gripping onto the paper. He closes his eyes and tries to calm down the swirling emotions inside him. Half of him wants to fight and the other wants to restrain himself. Instead of doing anything though, he just gives her an empty look and responds with, "Yes, ma'am." He slowly walks out of the room and closes the door lightly behind him.

"Failed another writing assignment I see, Silver the Hedgehog."

Silver cringes when he hears the voice. His fists tighten and accidentally crumples the paper in his hands, but he keeps his composure. He continues to walk down the hall and past the owner of the annoying voice.

It's Jet the Hawk.

The kid that's been in his classes since preschool and Jet never resists the urge to bully him every chance he gets. He knows better than to talk to him though. He's learned his lesson when he got into a fist fight with him in preschool. Shadow was very clear with Silver when he told him to never interact with that kid ever again. He was grounded for what felt like forever after that. Both his books and video games were taken away from him and he felt like he was on probation, only getting out of it with good behavior. Not even Sonic was able to free him from that near death sentence.

He can still hear his dad's voice in his head when he had said, "*Y-yeah. Sorry, kiddo. I kinda have to agree with Shadow on this one.*" Sonic *never* agrees with Shadow on a proper punishment. Ever.

It was mortifying.

Usually this is where others would give up and leave Silver be, but Jet is a special case. He's *always* a special case.

The green hawk drops his hover board onto the ground, the one no teachers or principals have ever given him any strife for, and he gently floats alongside the walking hedgehog. "What'd you do to anger the Tidal Tempest this time?" Jet asks with a smirk to his voice.

Silver just tsks and shakes his head. He's vowed an oath of silence. He will not talk to him. He knows better. It's more trouble than it's worth.

It's as if it doesn't matter to Jet though. He keeps talking like they somehow know each other. They could almost be mistaken for friends. Almost. If Jet's words didn't have potent undertones of condescension. "The harder to push with that woman, the harder it will be to get through the school year," Jet does a small trick, a kickflip if Silver were to guess, before he continues, "It's like a wave. You have to ride *with* it. Not against it."

Silver feels his teeth clench. He hates water. He hates Jet. He hates how long this hallway is. The exit couldn't be any further. He feels like the double doors are getting farther and farther and farther away with each step he takes. And since all of the kids have filed out already, he can't meet up with

any of his friends to escape this agony.

Being alone with this jerk couldn't be worse on his self-esteem. He hates being alone. He hates the silence. It makes him think and ponder on darker subjects. Subjects he'd never normally delve into. It's nice when he's trying to write or read, but alone in an empty hallway with the literal scourge of the universe? Torture.

"Silver me timbers! There ya are," a voice calls out loudly.

Silver feels his entire demeanor change. It feels like a weight has been lifted on his entire body and he has a bright smile on his face. "Marine," Silver manages to say as he turns back down the hall to meet the voice.

The little raccoon girl hops with excitement before literally throwing herself at Silver. Her arms wrap around him like a trust fall and Silver immediately catches her. He stops when he realizes where she had come from and gently puts her back down on her feet, "Wait. Why are you still here?"

"Not talkin' to the principal if that's what yer thinkin'," she draws a cross above her heart, "Strewth!"

"Marine," a gentle and patient voice calls out as tapping heels echo down toward them, "Please, do not run in the halls. You are in enough trouble as it is."

Silver knows that voice. His ears perk up and his eyes sparkle when he sees Blaze stop in front of them. His smile widens and he gives her leg a small hug, "It's so good to see you, Blaze."

Blaze nods with a hummed agreement and runs her fingers through his forehead quills, "Yes, but why is someone of your merit staying this late after school?"

"Hey," Marine shouts in annoyance, "I take offense to that!"

Silver feels bad for Marine. She's a year younger than him and behind in all of her studies. He was devastated when the school board wouldn't let him be in the same grade as her because of his birthday being in November. The fact that he'll never have the chance to be in the same class as his best friend was devastating for him. He feels that if they were to study the same material together, she'd have an easier time. In turn, Marine would give him the confidence and emotional stability he needed.

Blaze glances up and sees the green hawk hanging back. She knows of him and what had happened. She knows Silver and what kind of kid he is. He'd never attack anyone without being provoked. So, she does not trust Jet one bit.

She takes one step forward, boring her eyes into his and asks, "Do you need something?"

Jet fidgets a little before shaking his head, "N-no, ma'am! Just leaving!" He gets on his board and leaves out the double doors.

Silver watches him go and he reaches up to grab Blaze's hand, "Thank you."

Blaze's features soften and she nods back at him.

Silver likes Blaze. A lot. Being his best friend's mother is one reason, but she's so much more than that. She babysits him and takes him places when Sonic can't. She's a stay at home parent much like Sonic. It's nice to have another guardian to look up to when Shadow works mornings and afternoons.

Blaze's wife Amy works most days at the café she had opened in Station Square and it actually attracts quite the crowd. She's famous for her pastries and lattes. Although this means her hours are all over the place, but she still loves and cares for Marine and gives her as much time as she possibly can.

Blaze is somewhere between an older sister and a mom to Silver. She looks out for him and is someone he can talk to if he's down. She's good to have around during situations like these.

Sonic is his dad and he loves him, but his advice can sometimes be too optimistic and unrealistic. He believes everything can be fixed with a flash of a smile and shots of some finger guns. Which works for Sonic, but for Silver... that isn't him and things are a bit more complicated. Befriending someone like Jet would be like befriending the devil and that is absolutely not going to happen.

"Sonic is outside waiting to pick you up, Silver," Blaze informs him in case he wants to get going.

"Ooooh!" Marine coos happily and jumps up and down excitedly, "I hope he brought that big beaut of a car!"

Silver frowns. He hopes not. He kind of wanted to leave school discretely today.

Silver says his good-byes to Blaze and Marine before walking out of the exit. He definitely sees the car and he breathes a sigh of relief that there aren't too many people watching. That is, until one of the angry teachers come stomping out of the building over to the hotrod.

"Mr. the Hedgehog! How many times must we tell you that you cannot park in front of the fire hydrant," the angry teacher shouts.

The black tinted glass slowly slides down and Sonic rests his arm against the now open window as he gives the middle aged woman a charming smile, "Hello, Ms. Wright. Have you been workin' out? 'Cause you look great! And have you done something new to your hair?"

The teacher gets a little flustered by the comment, "I... I...! Mr. the Hedgehog that is completely inappropriate!"

"So, is there a Mr. Wright in the picture yet?" Sonic goes on, knowing he's totally getting to her as he gives her a half-lidded look.

The teacher is completely flabbergasted and unable to answer his question.

Silver rolls his eyes at his dad as he makes his way around the car and gets in. He tosses his backpack on the floor and buckles his seatbelt.

"Well, once you know hit me up, okay?" Sonic finishes as he puts the car in drive and sends her a wink. He sees a group of teachers huddled in the corner of the building looking out through the large glass windows. Most he's already successfully flirted with in order to get out of petty situations such as this. He blows a kiss their way and watches as one of the male teachers faints from the action alone. Sonic reeves the engine before darting off toward the exit.

"You're embarrassing, you know that right?" Silver huffs out, pulling his knees up to his chest.

"Me? Embarrassing?" Sonic says with a snort as he takes a pair of sunglasses that are hanging from the collar of his shirt and flicks them open before putting them on, "You have the coolest dad alive, kid. When you're older, I'll show you how to work that magic."

Silver just grumbles and rests his head against the door.

“Aw! What’s wrong, Silvy,” Sonic coos out, “Did you have a bad day?”

“Dad, I’m eight years old now,” Silver states with a grunt, “Stop calling me that.”

“Oh, excuse me,” Sonic responds in mock offense, “Want me to stop and get you a suit and tie too?”

Silver smacks his dad’s arm playfully and can’t help but snicker, “Stop it! You’re being a butt!”

“There’s that smile of yours,” Sonic teases with a grin.

“I’m not smiling,” Silver turns away, but Sonic can see the kid’s smile in the reflection of the window.

“Speaking of butts: How’s that teacher treating you?” Sonic asks just to change the subject. He knows if he pushes too far, Silver’s smile really will go away.

Silver pouts and decides to sit forward now, “If she’s not treating me like a two year old, she’s treating me like I’m about to do something wrong at any given moment.”

Sonic nods slowly like he knows. “I’ve been trying and failing to work my magic on that one, but…” Sonic makes a face before shrugging and muttering under his breath, “She’s probably too old to be a cougar.”

Silver lifts an eyebrow at Sonic, “She’s a *human*, dad.”

Sonic’s eyes widen when he realizes Silver heard what he had just said. His eyes dart back to him and then away. “O-oh, yeah! So, she is. Haha!” Sonic clears his throat and changes the subject, “Nice weather we’re having!” He winces because the sky is cloudy and looks like it’s going to threaten rain at any moment.

“I don’t need you fighting my battles all the time,” Silver responds, the entire situation flying over his head.

“Don’t go all lone ranger on me now, little guy,” Sonic replies in a softer tone.

“If I tell you what’s wrong, you promise not to tell father?” Silver asks with all seriousness.

Sonic takes one hand off the wheel, mimes the silent motion of locking his lips shut and throwing away the key. He side glances Silver with a smirk that tells him to proceed.

“I’m *bored*,” Silver says loudly and tiredly as his limbs hang from his body like their too much weight for him to carry, “I don’t mind other subjects, but reading and writing? I’m so bored!”

“Those are your favorite subjects though,” Sonic states like he’s confused about what the problem is.

“It’s *too easy* and Mrs. Labyrinth knows it so she’s purposefully making it harder on me for *no reason*! She doesn’t think I can read *Tales from the Arabian Nights*,” Silver explains as he digs through his backpack.

Sonic lets out a horrified gasp when he hears that as if it’s the worst accusation he’s ever heard.

“She thinks I can’t properly process what I’m reading and that you wrote my report for me,” Silver goes on to explain a little louder.

Sonic stifles a laugh and says, “Good one. Me and homework mix as well and oil and water.”

Silver is covering his mouth and laughing with him.

“Want me to go back? I’ll put this bad boy in reverse and give that woman a piece of my mind,” Sonic says, motioning his shoulder back at the building that’s a significant distance away.

Silver sighs, “No, it’ll just make it worse.” He looks down at the piece of paper again and furrows his brow, “If I ask father to be put into a higher level reading class... he’ll probably take one look at my grades and say no.”

“Leave Shad-Dad to me, kiddo,” Sonic tells him with a confident smile, “In the meantime, just try to get by.”

“Thanks,” Silver says quietly with a smile. It drops a little like he’s disappointed in himself, “I feel like I can’t talk to him... Not like how I talk to you.”

“Hey, that’s not your fault. Shad’s like that,” Sonic tries to reassure him. “His natural state is stressed that’s why his quills are all...” Sonic makes the swooped motions around his head as he laughs.

“What’s *he* so stressed out about,” Silver questions accusingly.

“The mortgage, taxes, insurance agencies,” Sonic lists off on the top of his head, “but mostly his high demand job.”

Silver is just blinking at him. He doesn’t know what the first three things are, but he seems interested about the job thing, “What does father do at work?”

Sonic opens his mouth to answer, but lets it hang open for a moment. He slowly closes it and furrows his brow. “I know! Let’s listen to music!” Sonic says in a sing-song tone as he flips the radio on. He usually settles with something rock or punk-rock with a guitar solo or two, but today as he’s flipping through channels something catches his attention.

Silver eyes the radio with a weird look because the audio sounds... Well, to put it lightly, *old*. “Why is it so scratchy?” Silver asks as he scrunches his face a little.

Sonic snickers at the question. “This stuff was recorded before HD was even a thought in people’s minds,” he explains with amusement, “Definitely recorded before I was born.”

Silver’s eyes get all huge when Sonic says that, “Things were made before *you* were born!?”

Sonic stiffens at the question before replying defensively, “I’m only 29, Silver! I’m younger than most of your classmate’s parents!” Sonic knows he doesn’t age, but he always gets the paranoia that maybe one day it’ll kick in again so he adjusts the rearview to get a better look at his face to inspect for wrinkles. Luckily, nope. Nothing. Just the stark realization he’s been on this planet for almost three decades now.

Silver sends Sonic a sly look because he likes the fact that he’s able to push his dad’s buttons once in awhile instead of the other way around. “Then, why are you listening to this *junk*,” Silver leans forward to change the station, but Sonic’s hand gently guides it away.

“This stuff was made when Shadow...” Sonic begins to explain excitedly, but stops himself. His face drops a little before he replaces it with a smaller, more nostalgic smile, “This was the song your father and I danced to on our wedding day.”

Silver gives Sonic a surprised look. After hearing that, the small hedgehog sits back and just listens to the lyrics. It took a moment of getting used to, but he did kind of like the singer’s voice. It was deep,



but kind of light. He waits patiently for the song to end before asking quietly, “Do you think I can listen to the whole thing when we get home?”

Sonic’s face softens and his smile broader than before, “If we ask Shad-Dad nicely, I’m sure we could. If not, I’ll just pull it up on my phone.” Sonic is silent for a long moment before whispering, “It sounds better on the record player though.”

Silver can tell Sonic is lost in a daze of his own thoughts, delving into a happy memory and he doesn’t want to bother him. Instead, his attention focuses on the next song that had come up on the radio. He strangely doesn’t mind the sound anymore. For some reason, the lyrics are itching at his mind as if he’s heard them before, but there’s no conceivable way that’s possible.

When they pull into the driveway and get out of the car, they immediately notice something is up because the black and red motorcycle is in the driveway.

“Is father home early?” Silver wonders out loud.

There’s a smirk to Sonic’s voice when he answers like it’s a pleasant surprise, “Aw yeah.” His blood is pumping with a challenge as he runs up to the porch. He skids in front of two fully loaded Nerf guns before grabbing the note that’s carefully folded next to them.

It reads:

*Dear Sonic,*

*I’ve time and again asked you to complete the task of doing dishes, yet I have had to wash them for the last two weeks. For your defiance, you must now feel my wrath and pay. I hope you know your way around firearms because I am fully loaded and prepared for your arrival. Silver will be your assist and it’s only fair since he’s been assisting in keeping the living room cluttered. He will learn firsthand that it is not a game room to disorganize at his own accord.*

*If, by a microscopic stroke of luck, you best me at my own game I will no longer badger you about your transgressions and I will deal with the messes that will inevitably arise. Although if you fail, you both must wash the dishes every night for a month and video game playing will only be allowed on weekends.*

*I wish you both the best of luck...and my condolences that it has to be this way.*

*Love,*

*Shadow*

Sonic whistles like he’s impressed when he finishes reading, “Looks like Shads put a lot of effort into this one. We have a lot on the line, kiddo.”

Silver holds his hand out and takes the note. He reads it over to get the gist and gives Sonic a look of horror, “He’s punishing *me*, for you not doing the dishes!?”

Sonic leans down and grabs the two toys, handing one to Silver, “No way! You’re the one who did the living room.”

“Yes,” Silver responds with a bite to his voice as he wraps his finger around the plastic trigger, “but this probably wouldn’t have happened if you just did them once in awhile. At least I put everything to the side so it’s not in the way.”

Sonic rubs the underside of his nose sheepishly because Silver's probably right, but he's the dad. He's not going to take the fall for that. "Look," Sonic states, "We're in this *together* and we work as a *team*! There's only one of him and two of us! There's still hope! Now, who's ready!?"

"You first," Silver just exchanges a stale look with him as his lips twist in disgust as he motions the plastic barrel of the gun at the door, "That way I can use your body as a shield if I need to."

"I'll take it," Sonic replies with a thumbs up, "As long as one of us is standing in the end, that's all that matters!" He places his hand on the front door and swings it open in a dramatic fashion. He notes that Silver is peaking his head in before ducking and rolling into the kitchen behind the counter. Sonic figures he'll act as a distraction while Silver tries to find a vantage point so he calls out, "Better get those rubber gloves ready, baby! You're gunna be on dish duty for a long, *long* time!"

It's a split second and it happens so fast that Sonic doesn't even realize what's happened until he turns to his side. One of the brightly colored foam bullets is stuck on the glass of the front door right next to Sonic's head. He swallows lightly before looking around for any sign of Shadow.

"That was a warning shot, love," Shadow sneers out in a wicked tone, "I suggest taking some cover because the next shot won't be so lucky."

Sonic can't yet pinpoint where Shadow's voice had come from, but he's going to take a wild guess and say the living room. He ducks behind the garbage can and looks around for Silver. His eyes widen in pleasant surprise when he sees the kid up high, on top of the cabinets laying on his stomach with one eye open like a sniper surveying his area.

"Whatever, dude! You can't shoot what you can't catch! I'm faster than anything you throw at me," Sonic continues to taunt. He knows it's coming. He can sense it. He knows Shadow too well.

It's a brief moment, but he sees the neon orange Nerf gun angle around the side of the couch and take aim. Before the foam bullet can hit him, he stomps his foot on the lever for the garbage can and it springs open, causing it to stick on the stainless steel lid. Sonic uses that moment to swing around and go trigger happy, aiming at the couch.

"You'll run out of ammo that way," Shadow mocks.

"Yeah, well my marksmanship is crap so I gotta rely on luck," Sonic snickers and ducks behind the garbage can again. He motions to Silver and silently mouths over to him, '*He's behind the couch.*'

Silver nods in understanding and sets his sights on the couch.

Sonic smirks when he sees Silver getting into position. Now, all he had to do was bait Shadow out of his hiding place and if there's one thing he knows he's good at, it's baiting Shadow into anything.

He stands up straight and stretches his arms as he coyly walks over to the living room.

"Not a good move," Shadow remarks smugly, "You're leaving yourself open."

"I'm only open if you decide to take the shot," Sonic taunts, continuing his strut even as the tile floor ends and the carpet begins, "That's all up to you though. I don't think you have it in you." A foam bullet flies through the air, just grazing the side of his face. Sonic just scoffs, "Now who's wasting ammo?"

"So, you forfeit?" Shadow questions him.

"I'm not exactly waving a white flag here, Shads," Sonic states. He pulls the toy up and shoots. It

hits the sliding doors, making a direct hit on Shadow's reflection.

Shadow tsks and crawls around the other side of the couch, his reflection disappearing with him. "You're asking to get hit," Shadow grumbles, clearly getting annoyed at this point.

"Then do it," Sonic teases him, standing right in the middle of the living room.

"I know what you're doing," Shadow states angrily, "One day, you're going to get yourself killed like that."

Sonic sighs and lets his arms hang like he's bored, "It's a *game*. We're *playing*. Have *fun*."

"Ah!" There's a short cry that comes from the kitchen. One of the foam darts is stuck on the cabinet, before the suction finally gives and it falls down. Silver quickly crawls back and climbs down.

"Shoot," Sonic whispers under his breath as he runs over to Silver, "Drop down, buddy! I'll catch you!" He opens his arms and catches the kid, turning his back toward the living room. It's only one shot and it hits him dead center of his back.

Silver looks up at him with a frown, "I'm sorry."

Sonic shakes his head, "Don't worry. I'm happy being your living shield."

"I'll avenge you," Silver says with big serious eyes.

Sonic snickers and gives him a noogie before gently putting him down on the ground, "I believe in you."

Silver rushes into the living room with a battle cry as he holds his toy gun out. He can see Shadow's quills coming in and out of view from behind the couch like a shark in the water. He angrily lets his finger squeeze at the trigger as the foam bullets hit and bounce off of the wall, but not hitting anything in particular. He skids under the coffee table and waits, eyes darting around and his pulse pumping in his ears.

"Acting out of anger is almost as bad as not taking this seriously at all," Shadow voice comes out blandly.

Silver can feel his body tense at the comment. He hates that about his father. It always seems like nothing he does is up to Shadow's standards. He's always just expected to do everything perfect the first time. Like, he can't act on his emotions at all. He grits his teeth harder and wonders if he even *cares*.

Silver rolls out from his hiding place and climbs up the sofa, to the headrest. He can see Shadow, but he's laying on his back with the gun pointed right at him. Silver freezes for a moment and jerks back just before the foam bullet can hit his forehead. The sudden motion causes him to fall back onto the couch cushions and he lays there for a moment in fear.

"You almost had him," Sonic cheers from the kitchen, smacking his hands on the counter top, "You can do it, Silver!"

Silver fights the tears pricking from his eyes and nods before he picks himself back up. He flips over the arm of the couch before another bullet can hit and he presses his back against the side so he can catch his breath.

"Do not charge headfirst at your enemy unless you're certain you have the upper hand," Shadow

warns him.

Silver growls. He's getting tired of being told what to do and how he should do it. He wants to do it his way.

Silver whips around the back of the couch and shoots without taking aim. Although when he does, Shadow is no longer there. His finger had squeezed the trigger, but nothing came out. He looks down at it and squeezes it a few more time before realizing the plastic barrel is empty.

Shadow's chuckle resonates from the other side of the couch, "Out of ammo? Such a shame."

"Silver!" Sonic shouts and tosses his gun into the center of the living room, "You can do it! I believe in you!"

Silver narrows his eyes and nods. He pulls himself up from the headrest and flips over his father in one swift motion. He lands on the carpet and grabs the gun before tumbling onto his back.

Shadow is sitting on the couch with one leg crossed onto the other and is aiming at him, "Bad move."

Silver whips the gun up and squeezes the trigger. He winces because he didn't really get a chance to aim, he just took it.

The foam bullet hits Shadow's gun and it's enough force to ricochet it back so that the bullet aimed at Silver shoots and barely misses his face.

Silver gives Shadow a look of shock and Shadow is returning the same look. It's deathly quiet between them.

That is, until Sonic shouts, "Aw man! I can't believe I just recorded that! I have to send that to Tails! He's gunna flip!" Sonic taps away at his phone, letting little squeals of delight leak from his throat.

Silver manages to catch his breath before slowly standing up, not lowering his gun. He gives Shadow a victorious smirk, "Looks like we're at a stalemate, father."

Shadow lets a grin slide across his face as he slowly uncrosses his legs and stands up, "I suppose we are." He tosses his weapon to the ground and the game looks to be done. Although when he makes his way to Silver's side his hand snaps up, twists Silver's wrist back, and forces him onto the ground. It isn't enough to hurt, but he did manage to obtain his gun and is pressing it against the back of his head.

"Boo!" Sonic calls out from the kitchen, "Foul play, dude!"

Shadow chuckles lowly at him and states, "You're hardly in a position to play referee. You were the first one out."

Silver wriggles out of Shadow's grip and pushes him away angrily. He stomps his feet and balls his fists, "I had it! I won! You cheated!"

"It wasn't cheating," Shadow clarifies, finding his son's temper tantrum amusing, "Never assume a fight is over until it's truly over."

Silver whips his body around and shouts, "Will I ever be good enough for you!?" He hates how he feels the tears pricking at the corners of his eyes and he hates how he can't control it. He shakes his head and stomps up the stairs and down the hallway before slamming his bedroom door shut.

Shadow feels his shoulders slump a little before picking himself off the ground.

“Not cool, Shads,” Sonic says as he’s leaning against the counter with his hand resting on his cheek, “Can’t you ever just let the little guy win? You gotta admit, that was pretty cool.”

Shadow begins picking up the living room and placing everything on the coffee table for the time being, “If I did that, he wouldn’t learn. If he were ever put into a situation like that...”

“I’m gunna stop you right there,” Sonic interrupts like he’s exhausted of Shadow’s attitude, “You’re gunna crush his spirit like that. Let him build a little confidence.”

“Confidence isn’t going to save him on the battlefield,” Shadow shoots back, “An ego will kill him.”

“He’s not on a battlefield, Shadow,” Sonic says with a slight edge to his voice, “Most days, he’s on a playground. Let him do that. Let him *play*.”

Shadow just sighs and stands where he is, rubbing at his inhibitor in an insecure manner.

Sonic glances down at how Shadow is fidgeting and stands up straight, “This doesn’t have anything to do with the dishes, does it?”

Shadow’s gaze averts toward the sliding doors, on the backyard.

Sonic frowns at Shadow’s reaction and makes his way into the living room. He stands next to his husband, but doesn’t say anything. He just waits.

Shadow lowers his voice before sending Sonic a quick glance before turning away, “You know how Rouge is on leave?”

Sonic quirks an eyebrow up and snickers, “Yeah, she’s having a baby, Shadow. She’ll be back in 9 months. She’s not gone for good. I can’t see Rouge ever leaving your team.”

“That’s not it,” Shadow murmurs softly, “We were assigned a rookie to take her place...”

Sonic’s smile falters a little when he hears that. “Okay,” Sonic says, urging him to go on.

“He lost his life during one of our missions with Omega and I,” Shadow finishes like it’s hard to say.

Sonic blinks a few times like he doesn’t understand. “Wait,” Sonic shakes his head, “When did your missions start getting that serious?”

Shadow lets out a breath of air before turning back to Sonic, “We didn’t think anything of it. We assumed the activity happening around Prison Island were random attempts to break in. It didn’t seem organized until today.”

Sonic’s eyes drop before his brow furrows.

“I didn’t keep it from you because I wanted to,” Shadow attempts to explain, “These missions were to be strictly confidential. Although now that the media has gotten a hold of it, it’s open to the public...”

Sonic shakes his head, “No, I’m not mad at you.” It’s quiet between them for a moment. Both not really knowing what to say. But Sonic asks because he has to know, “It’s Eggman, isn’t it?”

“It’s still under investigation,” Shadow states stiffly.

Sonic just laughs bitterly. That's all Shadow needed to tell him. He swings his arms a little before letting out a breath of air and returning to his sunny demeanor, "Well, no use crying over spilled milk. When he comes, he comes, and I'll kick his butt like always."

"Killing isn't exactly his MO though," Shadow states with a clenched jaw.

"So, he's working with someone and keeping a low profile in jail," Sonic replies with a shrug of his shoulders, "That's not new."

Shadow takes out his phone and scrolls through it, pulling up the article. He hands it to Sonic to read. "The kid was barely 20. Fresh out of the academy," Shadow goes on to explain.

Sonic eyes the screen and his face drops before lifting his hand to his mouth, "Are you kidding me?"

"A group of mercenaries," Shadow states, "Not human."

Sonic's face hardens and he holds the phone back out for Shadow to take like he doesn't want to read it anymore. "I'll cover for Rouge," Sonic suddenly says.

"No," Shadow retorts with a snarl, "You're staying here and keeping an eye on Silver."

"Screw that," Sonic argues, "I'm Eggman's target. He wants me. I'm not going to sit here and let that happen."

"That's exactly what he wants," Shadow states with anger, "I'm not going to just hand you over to him."

"So, you're just gunna let more people *die*?"

Shadow's ears pin back and he looks away, clutching his chest.

"Shadow..." Sonic feels his anger cooling into regret, "I'm sorry. That's not what I meant."

"No," Shadow whispers with disgust, "One of ours died because I hesitated to take down our enemy." He turns back to Sonic and hardens his stance, "I will not let that happen again. They will be detained by any means necessary."

Sonic swallows thickly, but doesn't argue with him.

"Don't interfere with my missions. It was one slip up and it was my fault," Shadow goes on to say with all seriousness, "I will handle this and when it's over, it will be over. So, we go about our lives as normal because that's the final outcome. I will take down those mercenaries and the doctor will stay in incarceration."

Sonic forces down his hero complex and nods his head. Similar instances have happened in the past and nothing has come of it except making Sonic's mind a mess. When that happens, the house and his own duties as a parent go haywire as well. He needed to learn to let it go and trust in Shadow to handle things.

"On the off chance things don't go according to plan, you damn well know I need you here. To protect our home, our family, and our future," Shadow finishes and leaves no room for arguments.

Sonic turns and watches Shadow head out into the garage. No doubt to work on his bike. He usually does just to clear his mind, but Sonic follows anyway. As he sees Shadow lift the garage door open and guide his bike inside, Sonic lightly closes the door that leads into the kitchen. "I know you've

been busy and I've been meaning to ask for awhile, but..." Sonic starts to say carefully, "What should I tell Silver? He's been asking about your job and what you do."

Shadow sharply turns toward Sonic with a scowl, "And what *exactly* have you been telling him?"

Sonic holds his hands up in defense, "Whoa! Easy, Shads! I haven't told him anything."

"Good," Shadow features relax a bit before putting the kickstand down and grabbing his tools.

"No, not good," Sonic retorts with his hands on his hips, "I can't keep conveniently changing the subject every time he asks. I know the government has helped a lot with keeping your name off the map, but he's gunna hear from someone about something and get the wrong idea. I think we should sit him down and talk to him about this. I don't think it's that big of a deal."

"When he's older," Shadow states dismissively.

"When he's...?" Sonic begins to ask, but is interrupted by his own bitter laugh, "He's eight, dude. And he's like... an intelligent eight-year-old."

"He's still just eight," Shadow murmurs as he organizes a few tools onto a rag spread out on the ground.

Sonic sighs and makes his way around the bike. He presses his hands on the seat and leans forward so he can make eye contact with Shadow. "Let me level with you for a sec, okay?" Sonic explains, "If he acted like *me*, when I was eight... I'd be like, 'Fair game, dude!' But he doesn't. I get the feeling you keep forgetting that a part of you is in there too."

Shadow cringes and says through clenched teeth, "I haven't forgotten."

"Then, what is it? Are you afraid that once he finds out what you do he's going to magically turn into you or something? Because that's not gunna happen. He's his own person," Sonic says like he's getting fed up.

Shadow lets out a sigh and drops what he's working on to look Sonic dead in the eye, "Do you remember when you first met me?"

"Of course," Sonic says a bit lighter.

"I was taught very early on that I was the first of my kind. The strongest living thing in existence. Nothing could rival my abilities. I felt invincible. I was an unstoppable weapon. It fed into a god complex and nearly extinguished life on this planet and any future hope for life to evolve here ever again," Shadow explains regretfully.

"So... You're afraid he'll hate you, or...?" Sonic asks like he doesn't get it.

"I have no grievances with him hating me," Shadow says softly, "He reads those super hero comics of yours as a means of escapism. He wants that. He wants some of that power. Once he gets a hold of it and realizes he is truly the Ultimate Life Form... What will he do?"

Sonic climbs onto the bike and swings his legs back and forth as he mulls over this. When Silver was a baby, his powers were really erratic. Although once he got older and his brain began to develop, the abilities have cooled down. Luckily, they remained under control since Silver could make his first real memories so he doesn't really know he has them.

Shadow does have a point though. Silver is them combine and he has the potential to be stronger

than both of them. They had to fuse into Silver once while fighting Solaris and that was the only conceivable way in fighting it. Silver has powers beyond both of their understandings. That does beg the question of: Does one living being need all of that power? In the past, Sonic's answer was no. Now, they have Silver and things are complicated.

"Do you know how many young men get through the training and walk into the commander's office with a brand new uniform thinking that they're hot shit trying to prove something to themselves and the next month their names are written in the obituaries because they thought they were an unstoppable force demanding praise for their service? How many people stop them? None. In fact, they're encouraged. They're encouraged to believe they're a weapon and wear it with pride. As if it's a fucking badge of honor," Shadow explains in a rough, tired voice.

"You *care*," Sonic says with a frown disregarding his statement, "You care if he hates you. I can see it in your eyes, dude."

Shadow locks eyes with Sonic and there's a tinge of vulnerability before he looks away again, "If that's the price I pay for having him here and alive, I'll take it." He lowers his voice and shakes his head, "I love Silver too much to watch him turn into that."

Sonic climbs off the bike and sits in front of Shadow, "Silver doesn't hate you. In fact, I think he really admires you. That's why he gets so frustrated when he can't get your approval."

Shadow just grunts in response.

"You can keep pushing him away, but he's a headstrong kid," Sonic says with a sly look, "He's gunna keep proving himself to you over and over. Might as well just give him what he wants."

"I will give him what he needs," Shadow grits out.

Sonic places his hands on Shadow's cheeks and squishes them together playfully, "Stop being so broody."

Shadow's hands grab Sonic's wrists a bit forcefully, but when he meets Sonic's eyes again a smirk appears on his face, "Stop being so cute so I can keep being broody."

Sonic crawls into his lap before nuzzling their foreheads together, "Never."

Shadow's arm hooks around Sonic's waist, pulling him in closer. He holds Sonic in a tender grip and guides their lips together. Their mouth melds as one in a warm, affectionate kiss and Shadow's skin prickles when he feels Sonic's hands travel down from his face to his neck. Shadow hums out a quiet moan before letting their lips part.

"How many teachers did you manage to flirt with today?" Shadow asks in a teasing manner, but there's still a bite to his voice.

"Why? Are you jealous?" Sonic snickers.

"Hmm..." Shadow murmurs out thoughtfully as he leans in to nip at Sonic's neck, "My hit list keeps getting longer and longer."

"They don't have anything on you, Shadow," Sonic speaks, trying to sound coy through breathy laughs.

"Damn right," Shadow growls out, fingers clasp onto what he can of Sonic's body before licking a hot stripe across Sonic's shoulder and sucking a hickey onto the bare skin.



“Shadow, don’t,” Sonic warns him lightly like he doesn’t actually want him to stop.

“Why?” Shadow murmurs hotly against his skin, “You wear these damn clothes on a regular now. I’m sure you can find something to hide it with.”

“Yeah, because people started to question why Blaze had to wear clothes on school property and I didn’t,” Sonic whispers before taking a deep breath in to cool himself down, “...but we shouldn’t do this while Silver’s here.”

Shadow sighs and surrenders Sonic’s shoulder before sitting back against his elbows, a disappointed look clear as day on his face.

Sonic finds it adorable. He climbs off Shadow’s lap and pats his shoulder, “Blaze said she’s taking Silver this weekend. So, it’ll be just you and me.”

Shadow’s eyes watch Sonic as he begins to make his way around, back into the house. His eyes are hungry, as if watching his prey get away and he snarls out, “Saturday and Sunday you’re *mine*.”

Sonic stops while he’s in the doorway and gives Shadow a hooded look from over his shoulder, “If you can hold out that long.” Even after Sonic closes the door, he can hear his laughter carry through the kitchen.

Shadow grumbles angrily and slowly leans back so his head touches the concrete ground. He’s been so concentrated on his missions he hasn’t realized until now how deprived of Sonic’s touch he’s been. He can feel it itching at his inhibitors how much energy he’s allowed build up. He knows he can hold out until the weekend, but Sonic is such a tease sometimes. It can be unbearable. How anyone can seem to resist Sonic is beyond him. Shadow is just glad he has him so he doesn’t need to.

There’s one bright side of this though. He isn’t thinking about work anymore.

## Distance



### Chapter Two: Distance

There's a soft knock on Silver's bedroom door and he rolls his eyes because he knows who it is, "Just come in, dad. You don't have to knock every time."

Sonic pokes his head inside and gives him a pout, "I'm just respecting your privacy."

Silver just looks at him like he grew another head, "I have a chao in my lap and a Dr. Seuss book in my hands. How much trouble do you think I'm going to get in?" Silver folds the book back closed and shifts so he can reach for his backpack. The chao gets annoyed and jumps out of his lap.

Sonic just exchanges a bitter look with Chocola. They're still not on the best of terms, but the chao at least tolerates his presence now. Although it tends to gravitate toward Shadow more. And on some occasions like this one, to keep Silver company when he's sad.

Silver hands Sonic the marked up piece of paper and asks, "Can you sign this?"

"For my biggest fan?" Sonic asks with big sparkly eyes, "I'd love to." Sonic takes the pen Silver offers him and bites the cap off with his teeth as he signs his name in big flashy letters and three dash marks in front so it looks like it's in the action of running off the page.

Silver just shakes his head and lets out a small laugh as he takes the paper back and tucks it into his folder.

"Do I have to meet with her again?" Sonic asks as he lays with his stomach on the bed, swinging his

legs back and forth.

Silver sighs, “Hopefully not. If she doesn’t like my next report probably.” He picks up the book again and sinks back against the headrest, “Maybe *One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish* is comprehensible enough for my big, dumb eight-year-old brain. Although I’m not sure how I’m going to write a report on this...”

Sonic’s face scrunches up a little bit as he looks over the bookshelf. His face brightens up before pulling out another one. “Well, if you’re goin’ for a Dr. Seuss book with a plot, how about *The Lorax*,” Sonic suggests before making a funny voice, “He speaks for the trees, you know!”

Silver can’t help but laugh at his dad’s impression. It reminds him of the days he’s stay home sick and Sonic would read to him to make him feel better. “I guess that will work,” Silver says with a shrug, “I could write about how big industries’ mass production of products are causing deforestation and destroying the ecosystems of different species.”

Sonic’s feet stop swinging for a moment and the two stare at each other for a long moment before he says, “Uh-huh.”

Silver hangs his head from his shoulder and grumbles, “No, I shouldn’t do that because then she’ll think you wrote it again.” He tosses the book aside and picks up the one he was previously reading.

Sonic gives him a sympathetic look before glancing around the room. There’s posters here and there and action figures laying about, but right above the kid’s bed is a big poster of Captain America. The unnamed super hero that probably keeps Shadow up at night. Sonic can’t help, but find it funny though.

“Say Silver...” Sonic begins thoughtfully as he stares up at the brightly colored super soldier in a dramatic pose, “Why do you like Steve Rogers so much?”

Silver doesn’t even look up from the book, he just answers, “He’s willing to do the right thing no matter what. Even if it means everyone turns against him, he’ll follow through to protect and serve. Even before he had powers and no one believed in him, he kept doing what was right even if it meant putting himself down on the line.”

Sonic folds his arms and rests his chin onto them, giving Silver a proud look even though the kid isn’t looking at him. “Kay,” Sonic murmurs quietly, “Just asking.”

Silver gets fed up with the book and presses his palms against his eyes, “This is so nonsensical! It’s like a fever dream!”

Sonic stifles his laughter, trying not to laugh at his son’s misery. “I think you’re thinking too hard,” Sonic tells him, “Work on it later and do something else.”

Silver just nods his head with a disappointed look, “I have until Friday to finish it anyway.” He fishes out his math workbook from his backpack instead and begins to fill in the equations.

Sonic admires his son for a moment and how his face is focused and serious. It’s almost like he can see the part that is Shadow shining through. He gives Silver a nostalgic look and says, “I can’t believe how fast you’re growing up. It feels like only yesterday you were shouting ‘Dad! Daaaad!’ from across the house and me and Shadow would say ‘Whaaat!?’ at the same time and you would come barreling down the corner giggling you’re little butt off saying ‘No, Shad-Dad! I meant Shad-Dad!’”

Silver smiles a fraction at the memory, but then frowns, “Yes, and then all that changed after I got

older... Now, I have to earn father's attention." Silver's brow furrows, feeling overwhelmed and those uncontrollable emotions bubbling up inside him again as he says, "I feel trapped between father's unrealistic expectations of me and Mrs. Labyrinth thinking my intelligence is just unrealistic entirely. I'm not really sure what to do..."

"Go at your own pace," Sonic says with a soft smile, "Everything will fall into place later."

Silver pulls his knees up to his chest and looks away. There was his dad's blinding optimism again. He appreciates it, but he wishes there was something he could actually do to change this. Silver rests his chin to his knees and pouts, "Why does father hate me so much?"

Sonic's eyes get huge and his mouth gapes open like that was the worst accusation of the century, "Wh-wha!? Shadow doesn't hate you! He loves you very much."

Silver just gives Sonic a deadpan look.

"No, I mean it," Sonic states as he flips himself up onto his knees, "You should have see Shadow's face when he held you in his arms for the first time. He immediately fell in love with the idea of being your dad. He wanted to protect you at all costs! You're the most important thing to him, Silver."

Silver's lips twist into a grimace like he doesn't believe him.

"I'm telling the truth," Sonic declares with a broad smile, "This house, all your books, video games, your schooling? It's all because he cares about you." When Silver doesn't respond to him and continues with his homework, Sonic pouts. He takes a minute to think before a smirk crosses his face. He slowly slinks forward, "Uh-oh..."

"Don't," Silver warns, motioning away from him.

"UH-OH...!" Sonic repeats a bit louder and shifts even closer still, "Looks like someone caught a case of the..."

"Don't," Silver warns once more, "Don't do it, dad."

"...grumpy-itis," Sonic continues regardless of Silver's protests.

"I'm warning you," Silver leans further away, shoving his foot into Sonic's face.

Sonic pulls Silver's foot away and shouts in mock horror, "Hurry! We need 20ccs of raspberries, STAT!!! It's spreading!" Sonic pushes Silver against the bed and begins blowing raspberries into the kid's belly.

"N-nnnooo—ahahahah!!!" Silver erupts into a fit of laughter, kicking his feet back and forth, trying to get out of his dad's grip. "St-sto-ahahaha-op! Stop it!" Silver begs before he feels his anger getting the better of him. He pushes Sonic away until the blue hedgehog almost falls off the bed, "I said knock it off, dad!" He's glaring down at him and gritting his teeth in a threatening manner, "I'm not to be trifled with!"

Sonic definitely isn't expecting to be thrown back as far as he had and if he hadn't faced scarier foes in the past, he would have been shocked. Although seeing the scowl on the kid's face just makes him think about Shadow even more. He places a hand on Silver's shoulder and says softly, "You're gunna be alright, kiddo."

Silver feels all the tension in his body melt away by his dad's soft words. Instead, it's suddenly filled

with sadness and the stress that has been building up all day. He wants to be independent, but he also just wants a hug from his dad. He sniffles a little, trying to hide the fact that he's crying and crawls over to Sonic so he can place his head on his chest.

Sonic instinctively wraps his arms around the distressed kid and holds him close, running his fingers down the longer quills in back. "It's okay, Silvy. I'm here. Just let it out," Sonic murmurs to him tenderly.

Silver grips onto Sonic's arms tightly as his shoulder bob with each sob, he presses his face closer into Sonic's chest hoping to hide his face, but it just makes the fabric of the shirt under his leaking eyes wet.

"That's it," Sonic says in a soothing manner, "I'm here, little guy."

"I love you, daddy," Silver chokes out in a small, broken voice.

A small smile graces Sonic's face when he hears that and holds him just a little bit tighter, "I love you too, Silver. Ya know, you don't have to act so tough around me. No matter how old you get, you'll always be my little Silvy."

Silver's fingers dig into Sonic's arms a little tighter and Silver just sobs louder. He needed to hear that. Sonic may be unrealistic and blindly optimistic about everything, but he loves Silver as he is. He doesn't have to prove anything to Sonic. He can just be himself and receive the same amount of unconditional love. And that's all he really needs right now.

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Shadow returns to the kitchen, having not realized how late it had gotten. He sees the plate of food wrapped up on the stove with the light illuminating over it. There's still a sour feeling inside Shadow's gut and he couldn't eat even if he wanted to, so he places the plate into the fridge. He glances over at the sink and notes how sparkling clean it is with not one dish in sight. He smirks at it before clicking the stove light off and heading upstairs.

He stops in front of Silver's door and gazes inside. He sighs because the kid had fallen asleep under a book again. He silently walks into the door and glares down at the action figures laying about before making his way to the side of the bed. Shadow carefully pulls the book away and closes it, placing it on the nightstand. He pulls Silver into his arms and pushes the sheets back before resting him against the pillow, tucking him in carefully.

Shadow's eyes slowly look up at the poster hanging over the kid's bed and frowns. He shakes his head before leaning down and placing a kiss on Silver's forehead. He whispers quietly, "Don't grow up too quickly."

Silver smiles and cuddles closer to the pillows before mumbling out dreamily, "Alright, Maria..."

Shadow takes a step back and pales. Did he just...? He gives Silver a concerned look before quickly disregarding it. His little friend was named Marine. So, he could have misheard it. He clicks the small lamp off and heads out, closing the door quietly behind him.

Shadow looks down at his hands and sees the dirt and oil on them from working on his bike. He needed a shower. He heads into the bathroom and gets under the spray of water, trying to think of anything besides what had happened today.

He was responsible for the kid that died. He was given orders to take him on one of their missions and Shadow hesitated. He knew something was wrong when they were surrounded. He just didn't

think it would have happened so quickly. There was no warning.

Just a slash and a spray of blood. No words exchanged. Nothing.

If this was Eggman or Eggman's lackeys, it didn't feel like it. It felt raw, personal, and precise. They moved quickly and hit their targets dead on.

Shadow had backed one up against a tree and held a crackling fist full of chaos energy, but he couldn't kill them. The mercenary he had pinned down just watched him, disregarding their own life and awaited their demise like it was a game.

Shadow clutches his arms and shuts his eyes tightly. These years that have past, the ones with his family... These comfortable, carefree moments in his life? Had they made him soft? Did he do the right thing? If he would have killed those mercenaries, that soldier would still be alive. That kid had his whole life ahead of him and now it was ripped away because of Shadow's own carelessness.

He couldn't even stick around to hear the commander's speech about how this is what they've signed up for and it is a risk they all must take because he knows it isn't true. That soldier's family would be forever altered because of him.

Shadow had been given the option to take some time off after this mission, but he can't. He has to see this through. He is the strongest agent they have and the only one capable of taking down Eggman. He couldn't just wait idly as the doctor makes his next move. No, Shadow needed to be ready for anything. He couldn't lose focus. He can't afford to.

Fed up with his thoughts, he shuts the water off and dries himself before walking into the bedroom. Sonic is already curled under the covers sleeping peacefully. An envious smile reaches his face, wishing he could sleep as soundlessly as that before he lays down next to his husband.

He hears Sonic sigh contently in his sleep and scoot closer, cuddling against his chest, "So warm..."

A single laugh seems to reach his diaphragm and nothing more before he places a kiss on Sonic's forehead before resting his head against the pillow. Wishing, hoping for rest.

## Closer to the Wind



### Chapter Three: Closer to the Wind

The next morning comes. Shadow had spent most of the night listening to Sonic's soothing breaths to keep his mind at bay. Sleep came eventually, but in a smaller dose than he would have liked. There was no fighting the clock though. He needed to get up and moving.

Sonic's arms that reach out to stop him from leaving are so comforting. He even contemplates calling in and reconsidering using those days off, but he doesn't. His anxieties get the better of him. What could happen looming over the horizon gets him out of bed.

Shadow walks into the commander's office and is ready for his orders.

She just gives him a confused look. Topaz places her files down on her desk and says, "I'm surprised you're here. You didn't have to come in today."

"You know I did," Shadow responds stiffly, "So, it shouldn't be much of a surprise."

Topaz frowns at that, "What happened yesterday wasn't your fault. No one could have predicted that. No one blames you for it."

"Except myself," Shadow grits out. He should be able to predict something like that. And he had, he just didn't act accordingly. He faltered.

Topaz sighs and nods at him, "Okay, well... If you're adamant about staying then I'll discuss the new replacement for your team."

“With all due respect, commander,” Shadow states with a snarl, “I’d rather work alone.”

“It’s dangerous to take on missions alone and you know that,” she warns as he tosses a file folder on the desk, “I had a feeling you would be uncomfortable with another human replacement, so I pulled some strings.”

Shadow eyes the folder before looking back up at the commander, “What is this?”

“His name is Zero,” Topaz explains as she opens the folder, a picture of said agent staring back at him, “Top of his class. He’s as skilled as he is tactical. He isn’t your ordinary rookie.”

“No,” Shadow snarls. He can tell by just looking at him that he’s no good. That smug face says it all. He’s seen others like him. He wants nothing to do with this.

“Opportunities don’t just fall in our laps like this,” Topaz tries to push, “We would be stupid not to take him in.”

“You have my respects, Topaz. You have proven yourself to be a fine commander in Abraham’s stead, but this is a red flag,” Shadow cautions, “All of this activity so suddenly? By a group of jackals no less...and you want to hire a jackal? Excuse me for being offensive, but you would be stupid to take him in.”

“Really?” Topaz asks with an eyebrow raised, “Anymore stupid than Abraham was for taking you in after the Black Arms attacked?”

Shadow winces, the comment hitting hard.

Topaz closes the folder and slides it over to him, “I don’t need your answer right away. I just ask that you consider it.”

Shadow sighs with a look of surrender and takes the folder, “Alright.”

“Thank you, Shadow,” Topaz says with a tone of appreciation.

Shadow just sends her a half-assed wave, already out the door.

-

“Dad!”

“Daaaad!”

“Dad, wake up!”

Sonic snorts and rolls out of the bed with a start.

“You slept in again,” Silver says with anger, “Class starts in five minutes!”

Sonic stretches the kinks out of his neck and gets up, “Alright, alright.” He hops onto his feet, but stops when he realizes something, “Wait, why didn’t you wake me up earlier then?”

Silver blushes a little and looks away.

Sonic snickers at him, “Did you sleep in too?”

Silver growls and grabs one of the pillows off the bed before throwing it at Sonic’s face, “You’re the



dad! You should be waking *me* up!"

Sonic lets the pillow slide off his face, but his smug look remains.

"Grow up," Silver snaps before stomping out of the bedroom. He grabs his backpack that's resting against the wall in the hallway and slings it over his shoulder, "I'm going to be late again."

"No, you're not," Sonic tells him.

Silver glances at him from over his shoulder, "There's no feasible way to get me there in less than five minutes."

"Not with that attitude," Sonic retorts, smugly. He breaks out into a sprint and scoops Silver up into his arms, "Got everything you need, kiddo?"

"Yes," Silver nods to him with a slight smile.

"Ready to kick it into overdrive?" Sonic asks with a smirk.

"Try not to take out the bushes on your way out?" Silver asks.

"I make no promises," Sonic states, getting into a running stance. He sprints out the door before really heading off behind a sonic boom. He completely bypasses the bushes, but takes out a mailbox instead. Luckily, it wasn't *their* mailbox this time.

Silver runs down the hallways. He's cutting it really close. He really, really wishes he had his dad's speed in times like this. Each clock that runs in and out on peripheral vision shows the seconds arms growing closer and closer to the top before he bursts into the classroom panting heavily. The bell rings just as he does it too.

Mrs. Labyrinth doesn't seem too impressed by it though. "Cutting it a little close this morning, Silver," she states as she motions to his desk, "Take a seat before I write you up for disrupting my class."

"Y-yes, ma'am," Silver says obediently before rushing to his desk, trying to ignore the snickers of his classmates. He lets out a sigh of relief as he settles down. He winces when he feels something hit his head though. He reaches and feels the piece of paper that's stuck in his quills. He pulls it out and notices that there's pen scribbled on it. He unfolds it and glares.

*I didn't think you'd show, slow poke.*

Ugh. Jet.

Silver turns around and sees that the green hawk is smirking at him and Silver just turns back around, crumpling the piece of paper back up.

He tries to focus on the subjects being taught, but everything feels so...dull. He knows about adding and subtracting. He finished his homework before everyone else. He exchanges papers with one of his classmates as Mrs. Labyrinth drones the answers off one-by-excruciating-one. He fixes a few mistakes for his classmate and he gets his back with a little smiley face and a perfect score.

Silver glances out the window into one of the other classrooms and sees the children lazing about on beanbag chairs and stuffed animals as they read an assortment of stories from a bookshelf. He almost wishes for something like that.

Mrs. Labyrinth is very structured. She has a schedule of each subject at each time in order. Even their 'break' is listed and she recommends homework to be done instead of socialization. He wishes something new would happen once in awhile. This was torture. At least mix it up a little. She doesn't even let them read out loud or play popcorn like other teachers did.

Silver sits and tries to focus on the words in the little book in front of him. He keeps finding his mind wandering though. Even though he doesn't like water, he keeps imagining himself as Sinbad on a ship sailing the seven seas. Battling giant god-like monsters and discovering new lands.

"You've been on the same page for ten minutes, Silver," Mrs. Labyrinth states having done her rounds like a security guard around the classroom, "Is there a problem?"

Silver shakes his head, "No, ma'am." He flips the page and begins reading the next. Or trying to at least. He doesn't really care about a buttered-toast loving pig and his 'hysterical' adventures.

Silver does enjoy recess though. He gets to see Marine and talk to her at least. Although it brings up an entirely different problem. Recess also means that Jet is with his older brother and sister: Wave and Storm. And they're just as mean.

Most days they tend to leave him alone, but today doesn't seem to be one of those days.

Silver is in the middle of focusing on getting across the monkey bars and Marine is excitedly watching him. He's almost to the platform when Jet jokes, "Look who it is? It's Silver the Hedgehog. You know, for being Sonic the Hedgehog's son you sure are slow. Is that why he named you Silver? Because you're always in second place?"

Silver's grip slips on the bar and causes him to fall on the wood-chipped ground. He internally groans when he hears the collective laughter of his classmates.

"Hey!" The little raccoon girl jumps off the platform and holds her hand out to Silver to pick him up off his feet, "Big talk from a chump who needs a board to go fast! I bet if Silver had one, he'd fly circles around ya!"

Silver cringes when he hears his friend's words, "Marine... don't..."

Jet looks offended at first, but then when he locks eyes with Silver's he finds himself kind of reveling in the idea. "I doubt it," Jet states with confidence, "but I'm all for a challenge. Although second place in a race with two is still last place, Silver. Or should I say *loser*."

Silver dusts his knees off and talks more to Marine than Jet, "I don't have a board and besides I don't need to race that jerk to know I'm better than him." He takes Marine's hand and gently guides them away.

Jet glares at the back of Silver's head before snapping his fingers, "Storm, give me your board."

Even though Storm is older and bigger than his brother, he complies like he's the boss. He lays his grey and gold board down in front of him.

Jet places his foot on the board and kicks it over to the retreating hedgehog.

The board hits the back of Silver's ankles and he sighs. He looks down at Marine and she's giving him a sheepish smile. He knows he shouldn't do this. He should walk away. He knows this is going to create more trouble than he needs, but there's a part of him that wants the challenge. His classmates are looking at him and it's getting harder and harder to say no.

“Fine,” Silver murmurs as he reaches down for the board and holds it under his arm. He walks over to Jet and stares him dead in the face, “If I win, you need to stop bothering me. No talking to me, no waiting for me after class, and no more throwing notes at me. Do I make myself clear?”

Jet’s eyes widened as if he didn’t expect Silver to speak to him directly. He hasn’t since the incident in preschool. Jet gives the hedgehog a nod and straightens his back, “Fine, but if I win you have to start sitting next to me in class so I can pick on you more.”

Silver looks away and snarls. He just made this ten times worse for himself. Why couldn’t he just walk away? Why did he have to do this to himself? He just holds his hand out and nods because there isn’t much use in fighting it at this point, “Deal.”

Jet smirks and takes his hand, shaking it, “Then, it’s agreed. We race from the jungle gym all the way over to the field goal in the soccer field.”

Silver glances at the jungle gym right next to him and the soccer field all the way into the distance. It was pretty far away, but he figures he’ll need the distance to fully understand how to work this thing. Now when he thinks that though, this sounds like the stupidest, most impulsive agreement he’s ever made.

The two make their way over to the jungle gym. Jet’s board is already down and his foot is on top as he’s pulling his goggles down over his eyes. He gives Silver an expectant look like he’s getting ready to make fun of him.

Silver just drops the board and watches it make contact with the ground with a cloud of dust. He coughs and hears Jet snickering at him. He places his foot on top of it and only then does it start to float, but it’s really unstable. He attempts to get on the thing and wobbles a little.

Jet watches him in awe for a second before knocking out of his stupor. “Remember that thing I said about riding with the wave and not against it,” Jet whispers so only the two of them can hear.

“Full offense, Jet,” Silver snarls out, “but I don’t need your handicap.”

“I just want a fair race,” Jet shoots back.

Silver laughs bitterly under his breath, “You? Fair? *Please.*”

Jet’s eyes narrow at him.

Wave makes her way in front of the two and holds her hand up in the air, “On the count of three, you go! One... Two...”

Marine comes barreling in, knocking Wave over, “...Three!!!”

The two dart out at the same time. Silver’s knees are shaking as he tries to keep the board straight, but it’s hard. It’s like he has no control over this thing. He continues on and wills it to go fast.

He hears Marine’s cheers in the distance and he finds himself smiling. At least someone was on his side.

“Straighten your back and spread your legs a little more,” Jet shouts over to him.

Silver just shoots Jet a glare and steers right into him, their boards sparking on impact. “Don’t tell me what to do!” Silver shouts before darting out ahead of Jet.

Jet's face twists into a frown and heads out after him.

Silver sees that Jet's catching up to him and he leans forward more, trying to gain some momentum. He can see the field goal. It's getting closer and he's in the lead. He leans further still.

"Silver," Jet shouts out to him again, "Don't lean forward like that!"

Silver doesn't listen though. He's so close. He's so close to being free from Jet's stupid bullying. He's so close to freedom. He can feel it. He leans a little more when he sees Jet swooping in besides him and the board shimmies and shakes. Suddenly, he doesn't really feel in control anymore. His knees shake and he tries to lean back, but gravity has other plans for him.

Jet sees this and jumps off his board, wrapping his arms around Silver. They both tumble to the ground, but Jet takes most of the fall. Their boards fly past in an uncontrollable fashion and Jet rolls them out of the way. Silver's board lands like a guillotine right next to Jet's back, barely missing him.

The kids meet up moments later and Marine is in lead shouting, "Who won!? Was it Silver!?"

Jet groans and pulls Silver away just enough to look down at him, "Are you alright?"

Silver looks shaken up a bit, but when his eyes meet with Jet's he pushes him away fiercely. He gets to his feet, leaving Jet on the ground as he stumbles over to Marine. Marine catches him before he can fall and he leans against her, catching his breath.

"You're welcome!" Jet screeches angrily as he gets back onto his feet, "Ya know, you have a bad temper!"

Silver looks back at him and states sarcastically, "Wonder why."

Marine helps him walk away as he shouts over and over, "You won, right? You were the winner!?"

The little raccoon's voice grows more and more distant and Jet turns to the board that's sticking out of the ground and kicks it over with rage.

Silver takes most of his lunch period to cool down from what happened. He sits with Marine who's bragging about how her mother makes the best cupcakes in the world as Silver thinks about being on that board.

He went...*fast*. Like, really fast. He's never gone that fast on his own before. Even though he fell at the end and almost got seriously hurt, it was exciting. He could feel his blood pumping and his heart soaring. It felt like a challenge. One he could compete with. One with an end goal in sight.

Nothing boring and nothing unrealistic, but something very, very plausible.

"You might have to make me a board," Silver whispers quietly as he tries to aim an apple slice in his mouth and misses. Except, he doesn't really care. His mind is this mesmerized by the race.

"I have ta what now?" Marine asks in confusion. Silver's eyes are a million miles away and she has to wave her hand in front of his face in order to get his attention, "Helloooo!? Earth ta Silver! Marine speakin'!"

Silver's eyes finally blink back into focus and he notices the apple slice being shoved into his cheek instead of his mouth. He blushes before popping it into his mouth and chewing. He swallows and locks eyes with Marine, "You need to build me a board like that."

“I’m not makin’ a board like that,” Marine argues.

“What!? Come on! Please?” Silver begs, taking her hand in his, “You made that water bike last summer!”

“Is my mate, Silver the Hedgehog, actually beggin’ me to do somethin’?” She asks with suspicious squinty eyes, “...Who are you?”

“I need...” Silver says as if he’s trying to gather his thoughts, “I need to feel that again. The wind against my face. The world around me flying by. Feeling weightless and free...”

Marine cringes when she sees how excited Silver is and she shrinks back a little, “Ya know how I said I built that bike all by myself...?”

“Yes,” Silver nods, urging her to continue.

“I mighta gotta little help from my moms,” she finishes, twirling her fingers together nervously.

Silver’s face drops when he hears that and his head collapses onto the lunch table. “I’m never going to relieve that experience ever again,” he groans out in disappointment.

“Why don’t cha just ask Jet to borrow his board again?” Marine asks brightly.

Silver turns so one eye is glaring at her like she just suggested to kill his pet chao.

“...Or maybe not!” Marine waves her hands anxiously.

Silver goes back to groaning his annoyances into the tabletop.

“I know,” Marine shouts like she just had an epiphany, “Why don’t we ask my mom to take us to your Uncle Miles’ place this weekend? He has a tonna cool stuff in that garage of his!”

Silver is actually considering it. He lifts his head off the table and places his finger to his chin in deep contemplation, “You know, I think that is an excellent idea. My Uncle is a master of his craft. He could give us a few pointers.”

“You mean, give *me* a few pointers,” Marine says proudly, jutting her thumb into her chest, “I’m the brains of this outfit after all!”

Silver just rolls his eyes and pulls her in for a noogie, “Whatever you say, Marine.”

She laughs in delight, trying to wriggle out of his arms.

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*I am a shooting star, and he mere jet wash*

*The wind currents that hit my face*

*Like a cool breeze sating this anger*

*Control, yet a fraction of freedom*

*I am a million miles away across the universe*

*But grounded on Earth all at once*

*Complete balance, harmony*

*A feeling I've longed for*

*Chaotic stability*

The bell rings and Silver doesn't hear it. He's too focused on his writing to notice. His pencil flies across his notebook page as he eagerly tries to get his thoughts out on paper.

Mrs. Labyrinth is sitting in her desk, giving the child an exasperated look. "Silver," she calls out to him. When he doesn't answer, she shakes her head and gets up. She snatches the paper away from him and glares down from over her glasses, "Silver, the bell has rung."

Silver blinks back to reality and looks around at the empty desks around him, "O-oh..." He begins to pack all of his belongings into his bag.

"Did you manage to get your father to sign your report?" She asks impatiently.

"Oh, yes," Silver nods as he pulls out said piece of paper.

The teacher frowns when she sees it and comments, "Your father's 'signature' keeps getting more and more...*ahem*...juvenile."

"Yes," Silver nods a bit distracted with what he's doing, "He's attempting to rebrand his name for some kind of cola company. Chaos Cola? I'm not sure. He does stuff like this all the time. Not sure if he's actually going to go through with it or not."

Mrs. Labyrinth doesn't seem to be paying attention though, "Am I going to have to have another conference with your father?"

Silver stops what he's doing and blinks, "What do you mean?"

"I don't appreciate you insulting my intelligence, Silver," she states with her hands on her hips.

"I..." Silver seems to be at a loss for words, "I'm not sure I'm following you, ma'am."

She hands the paper back to him and says sternly, "I want *both* of your parents signatures tomorrow and they had better be real this time."

Silver's face pales when he hears that and he tries to protest, "My dad *did* sign it though!"

"Not another word out of you, Silver!" She shouts, her face getting red with anger, "I've had enough of your back-sass! Is this how you're going to act in the real world? Do you think these manipulative ploys will be acceptable!?"

"Both of my parents have to sign it?" Silver asks quietly.

"Yes," she confirms.

Silver looks down in awe. His father was not going to be pleased with this. Sonic doesn't usually care about this stuff, but with Shadow...he could feel the veins in his body turning ice cold just at the thought. He couldn't fight with Mrs. Labyrinth though. He just nods slowly and takes the paper back.

He finishes gathering his things and goes to walk out the door.

Mrs. Labyrinth looks down at the notebook paper still in her hand and raises an eyebrow before calling out again, “Silver?”

Silver stops and winces before turning to her, “Y-yes?”

“Did you just write this?” She asks, holding the paper up in the air.

Silver winces when he sees his little writing, realizing he was caught. He wasn’t using his free time productively. “Yes,” Silver says in defeat.

“Do not bother with signatures,” she says as she tosses the paper onto her desk.

“What?” He asks, completely confused.

“Instead, I want to talk to both of them personally,” she says with a bit of amusement to her voice, “I’ll have the school board send a reminder of parent teacher conferences coming up.”

“M-my father is much too busy for-for...” Silver tries to say through chattering teeth.

“Nonsense,” she shakes her head and waves her hand like she’s done talking to him.

“B-but, my writing,” Silver goes to say, hoping to get it back so he can burn it in the nearest dumpster fire he can find.

“I’ll hold onto it,” she explains, already sitting down and marking papers, “Good-bye, Silver.”

Silver’s shoulders slump and he turns to walk out the door automatically. He feels like crying. What did he do to deserve this?

As he steps outside the classroom, he looks around carefully. Jet is nowhere to be seen. Good, he finally got the hint.

Silver stomps down the empty halls and his steps slow a little. He glances back just to make sure Jet isn’t going to pop out and scare him or something. Except, he’s nowhere to be seen. There’s a small part of him that’s kind of disappointed.

## On Further Investigation



### Chapter Four: On Further Investigation

It's going to be another late night so Shadow decides to send Sonic a text letting him know not to wait up for him as the helicopter lands on Prison Island. He steps out of the chopper and looks around at all of the police tape hung up in different areas. He finally spots who he's looking for and makes his way over. "Have you and Vector found any leads?" Shadow asks, looking up at the damaged wall Espio is taking notes on.

"Not yet," Espio replies, closing his small notepad, "There isn't much to go by yet. Vector should be in the middle of interrogating the doctor as we speak. I'm hoping he can't resist telling the public about this new plan of his."

Shadow nods and motions his hand for Espio to lead the way.

"Although it's hard to say whether this is the doctor's work or not," Espio continues in a serious manner as he guides Shadow toward the entrance, "It doesn't line up with his previous criminal history. He's threatened people before, maybe has had some casualties while conducting a new scheme, but he's never outright killed anyone to make a point."

Shadow nods like he can't but agree.

"Eggman is more of a..." Espio trails off as if trying to find the word, "*theatrical* criminal. It appears he wants everyone to know of his work."

"Mh..." Shadow nods.



Espio makes his way over to the police tape and lifts it up so Shadow can maneuver under it as they get to the front gate of the prison. Espio scans his badge and walks inside as the doors slide open. “While yes, the media has gotten a hold of the story, I doubt the good old doctor would find marking up a military prison as something flashy.”

“What do you mean... marking up?” Shadow asks with confusion.

“Oh, right. Sorry, we found it last night,” Espio informs him, “The media has only covered the murder of the government soldier. What we found is a bit strange to say the least.” The chameleon pulls out an ipad and scrolls through his picture before handing it to Shadow.

Shadow takes it and exchanges a look with Espio before scanning over the photo. Apparently one of the prison walls was vandalized with the words: *The rise and fall of the little blue savior*. Shadow feels a sour pit in his stomach when he reads it and quickly turns back to Espio, “Sonic.”

Espio nods to him, “No doubt, but...” He points down at the screen and locks eyes with the dark hedgehog, “This is very out of character for someone like Eggman.”

“How so?” Shadow questions, like he doesn’t see his point.

“This? It’s almost a compliment,” Espio goes on to explain, “I doubt someone like Eggman would ever write something such as this. And if he were, he would have it on display for the world to see.”

“So, their target is Sonic after all,” Shadow asks, handing the ipad back to him.

Espio holds it under his arm and looks away a bit uncomfortably, “...Or, more likely, you’re the target.”

Shadow raises an eyebrow at him, “‘Little blue savior?’ That’s more-so referring to Sonic, correct?”

“This feels more intimate. Private. Sonic wouldn’t be able to get a hold of this intel,” Espio clarifies, “You are the only one who is connected to Sonic that has access to this information. Do you see what I’m getting at, Shadow?”

Shadow gives him a grim look and nods, “It’s a threat.”

“Exactly,” Espio confirms as they make their way down to another part of the prison. Espio flashes his badge at the guard and the guard unlocks the barred door for them. As they continue on their way Espio pipes up again louder over the other voices around them, “I normally wouldn’t ask this, but I’m out of leads. So, is there anyone you can think of at the top of your head that might fit this description?”

Shadow sighs and doesn’t even know where to begin, “If you’re asking me if there’s anyone out to get me, you’re looking at a long list, Espio.”

“I had a feeling,” Espio replies with no offense, “I figured I’d ask anyway.” They stop in front of one of the interrogation rooms, in front of one of the one way windows. It appears Vector is having a time trying to get any information out of Eggman.

“Don’t play coy with me, ya madman! Confess already! We know you did it!” Vector bellows out angrily.

“I assure you, I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Eggman retorts calmly as if none of this bothers him, “I sat in that cell for a decade. You think I wouldn’t have broken out sooner if I could?”

“You’re a smart guy, doctor. Smarter than you’re lettin’ on. So spill before I beat it out of ya! I’d bet any one of these guards would look the other way and let me do it too! You don’t got one friend in this place whose gunna vouch for you!” Vector shouts, grabbing the doctor by the collar.

Espio sighs with exasperation and turns to Shadow, “Please, excuse me for a moment.” He bows before walking into the room. He places his hand on Vector’s and it only takes him touching one pressure point in Vector’s wrist to get him to release his grip on the doctor.

“Owowowowow!!!” Vector cries out and grabs his wounded hand.

“If you don’t mind, I’ll take it from here,” Espio states as he shoots him a look.

“You big bully,” Vector grimaces childishly before taking a seat on the other side of the room.

Espio sits down quietly and places his ipad down on the desk, folding his hands on the tabletop. “Let’s start over, shall we?” He holds his hand out to the doctor and a small smile shines on his face, “My name is Espio the Chameleon and I’ll be asking you a few questions today.”

Eggman just gives Espio’s hand a suspicious look before sighing, “What is this? Good cop, Bad cop? I’m not talking to you.”

The small, pleasant smile on Espio’s face darkens a fraction as he whispers so only the two of them can hear, “If you’re insinuating my partner is the bad cop, take note that I could slit your throat now and make it look like an accident and no one would be the wiser.”

Eggman visibly gulps.

“Now that I have your full attention, doctor,” Espio’s polite smile returns to his face as he spins his ipad back around for him to see, “I’d like you to take a good look at this photo and tell me what you decipher from it.”

Eggman adjusts his glasses a little and squints at it. After the words sink into his head, he smirks devilishly, “Looks like someone other than I has it out for Sonic. Please, tell me I’m getting a front row seat for this show.”

“Perhaps,” Espio says thoughtfully, “I might be able to reduce your time here if you tell me what I want to hear.”

“And what do you want to hear?” Eggman asks quietly.

“Names, doctor,” Espio clarifies, “I want names. Suspects.”

Eggman shakes his head and laughs, “How should I know?”

“May I remind you that your sentence here is life,” Espio states a bit more seriously, “I’m offering a light at the end of the tunnel.”

Eggman shrugs his shoulders, “Looks like I don’t have the key for that door then.”

Espio exchanges eye contact with Eggman for a long while before standing up, “Alright. Thank you for your time, doctor.”

“Wh-what!?” Vector shouts out, “You’re gunna just let him go!? Just like that!?”

Espio makes his way to the exit and Vector ferociously follows after. Once the door closes, he pulls Espio by the shoulder, “Lemme go back in there and beat him one! He’ll talk! I’ll make him!”

“No,” Espio states calmly. He exchanges eye contact with Shadow and frowns, “It would appear the doctor truly has nothing to do with this.”

Shadow folds his arms across his chest and hardens his stare, “He’s obviously lying.”

Espio places a hand on the hold Vector hand on his shoulder and politely guides it away. He makes his way back over to Shadow and whispers to him, “I have looked into his heart, Shadow. I saw nothing, but honesty. Unless he has somehow conditioned himself to believe it to be otherwise, he is telling the truth. A man like the doctor would not turn down the opportunity to be free. Not like this.”

Shadow looks down with confliction. None of this made sense.

“A word of warning, Shadow,” Espio states as he places a hand on his shoulder, “Now is the time to keep your friends close and your enemies closer. If there is anyone—anyone at all—please, tell me. We can help you. We can help your family.”

Shadow feels himself blinking back the emotions overflowing in his heart. The fear is almost crippling. He racks his mind before remembering something. He remembers the file Topaz handed him. “Zero,” Shadow mutters.

Espio raises an eyebrow.

“It’s probably too obvious, but there is an agent potentially being assigned to my team in Rouge’s place,” Shadow says quietly, “I’m not sure...”

Espio nods in understanding, “We’ll keep an eye on him.”

“But...” Shadow looks away with regret, “What if it isn’t him and I’m being bias?”

“Sometimes all we have to go on is speculation,” Espio informs him.

“What should I do?” Shadow asks quietly, a slight vulnerability to his voice.

Vector pats Espio’s back and motions his head to the exit, “I’ll uh... meet you out front, Espio. I need to make sure those dumb cops aren’t tromping all over our evidence.”

Espio nods to him and gives Vector an appreciate look before pulling Shadow to a more secluded area.

There’s a bench and Shadow uses it to sit down. He doesn’t know what to make of any of this. Usually, he knows what’s next and how to deal with it, but so many paths seem to be branching out with multiple possibilities that he can’t even get a grasp on anything.

“Don’t worry, Shadow,” Espio tries to console him, “Vector and I will work around the clock to close this case.”

“I know...” Shadow says tiredly and rests the back of his head against the concrete wall behind him, “I knew Abraham and I never really saw eye-to-eye on everything, but he always had a plan of action. A stepping stone for me to work with... but...”

Espio takes a seat next to Shadow suggests, “Perhaps you can ask his opinion?”

Shadow closes his eyes shut tight and feels his insides coiling like sharp barbed wire in his chest, “Abraham... he...” Shadow can feel the tears forming at the corners of his eyes and he tries to will them to stop. He takes in a deep breath to calm himself down before whispering, “His condition has

worsened. I had been visiting him every other weekend for the past year... and..." Shadow finally opens his eyes and they're distant and cold, "At first, the worst hurt was that he could not remember me. Which I took fine. I did not mind reminding him that he was my commander every time I visited. I was prepared for that. ...I had experienced that first hand myself. The mind. It's a complex machine."

"I'm sorry, Shadow," Espio murmurs quietly.

Shadow shakes his head, "No, it's fine. It's just..." Shadow winces and curls his hand into a tight fist before continuing shakily, "I was ill prepared for the trauma he had kept dormant in his head. I've caused him years of pain and suffering... It's like a scar upon his mind. I wish... I wish desperately he had just forgotten me entirely instead of... *this*..."

Espio's gaze falls to the ground and he swallows, "You aren't that person anymore, Shadow."

"I know," Shadow states with a bitter laugh as a tear rolls down his cheek, "but he doesn't. Not anymore."

"This kind of thing is hard. It's painful for everyone involved," Espio says sadly.

Shadow nods before wiping the tear away like a minor inconvenience before getting to his feet. He lets out a level breath before speaking, "If you have any advice for me, I'd be glad to hear it."

Espio presses his fingers together and gives them a calculative look before proposing, "If I were in your situation... I'd take the lead I have and go with it. Put Zero on my team and observe him carefully. Sometimes just watching someone can tell you more about them than looking into their background. Study how he talks, acts, how he carries himself. But most importantly, find a motive. A lot of the time it's less about *how* they're doing this and more about *why*."

"And if he doesn't have a motive?" Shadow asks.

"He'll have a motive, Shadow," Espio reassures him, "They *always* have a motive."

Shadow nods to him, "Thank you for your time."

"Anything for a friend," Espio states with a slight smile.

Shadow exchanges the same from over his shoulder as he makes his way out.

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It was a long day. He didn't have to stay as long as he did, but he felt like he needed to. He needs to know what's going on. This was less about him and more about...

Shadow opens the front door and closes it lightly behind him. He sees the dinner plate illuminated by the stove light once more and sighs. He goes to put it into the fridge next to the other one, but stops when he hears a noise coming from the other room. He bristles and makes his way into the living room, silently stalking closer.

"No... No, that's not it... No... No..."

Shadow carefully peers around the corner and sees Silver sitting near the television set. His record player is plugged into the wall and the small hedgehog is setting one vinyl down after another as if trying to listen for something.

Shadow glances at the analog clock on the stove that reads in bright green letters *11:45*. He grits his teeth and marches into the living room, “Silver, what are you doing up?”

This terrified hedgehog jumps and tries to hide the record player behind his back, “N-nothing, father!”

Shadow presses his fingers to his temples, trying to stop the throbbing headache that is inevitably coming. “Silver, it is a Thursday night and you have school tomorrow,” Shadow tries to remind him.

“I know,” Silver says defensively, “I-I know. I was going to go to sleep, but... There’s this song in my head. I heard it on the radio in dad’s car and... I can’t get it out of my head.”

“You need to ask permission before using other people’s things,” Shadow states a bit more strictly as his red eyes glow like dim coals in the darkness.

“I know,” Silver says a bit more desperately, “but you weren’t home!”

Shadow looks away with a frown when he hears that. He wasn’t. He hasn’t been. He was so wrapped up in all of this that he almost felt detached from his life at home. Whether he was intentionally doing it or not. Shadow sighs and takes a seat on the ground next to Silver, asking in a surprisingly gentle voice, “What does the song sound like?”

Silver blinks as if he’s surprised by his father’s reaction. He was sure he’d be reprimanded for shouting at him. Silver swallows and shakily tries to hum the tune, but he’s too nervous to even get that out.

Shadow can see this and he places his hand on the small hedgehog’s back. He feels Silver flinch away at first, but lean into it once he knows it’s okay. “Just tell me the lyrics,” Shadow says softer.

Silver opens his mouth and lets the lyrics pour from his mouth as quick as he can.

Shadow nods his head as if he gets the picture before placing a finger onto Silver’s lips to stop him. Shadow leans over to the box of records and cards through them one-by-one until he finds it. He pulls it out before stating, “Frank Sinatra.”

Silver’s eyes get wide when he sees the album.

Shadow carefully slides the vinyl out of the sleeve and places into onto the turntable. He takes the pin into his hand and delicately places it down as if he knows exactly where the song is. It softly begins to play soon after.

Silver’s ears perk up when he hears it and he looks back at Shadow with an excited look, pointing at it, “That’s it!”

Shadow just nods.

It’s quiet between them as the music plays. They silently listen to it until Silver hesitantly turns around to face Shadow. “My...my teacher wants to meet with you and dad during parent-teacher conferences,” Silver whispers.

“You seem worried,” Shadow comments with a smirk.

Silver winces and bites his lip.

Shadow sighs, “What did you do this time?”

“Why do you always have to assume I did something?” Silver asks with a pout.

“Perhaps you should hide the guilt on your face next time so I don’t assume anything,” Shadow retaliates with a dark chuckle.

Silver put his hands over his face to hide it before grumbling.

“Silver,” Shadow states with a melancholy tone, “Sometimes we make mistakes and we must learn from them. Although, it’s important that we think before we act because even the most minor instances can leave a long lasting impact on others. So, whatever you’ve done wrong... have integrity and face those mistakes head on so you can learn from them sooner rather than later.”

Silver is just looking up at his father in awe. In the moonlight, he looks like a super hero. The ones in the pages of his comic books, but Shadow is very much alive and real. Silver’s smile reaches his eyes and he tries not to cry in front of him. He nods and says, “I will, father. I promise. I’ll learn from my mistakes.”

“Good,” Shadow murmurs as the song finally ends. He switches the record player off and unplugs it before picking Silver up into his arms. He walks them up the stairs and down the hallway. He gently rests the child onto the mattress and tucks him in.

Silver watches as Shadow is about to leave and he says, “Wait, father.”

Shadow stops his trek and turns to the kid.

“My teacher is kind of mean...” Silver warns him.

Shadow smirks, his voice dripping with malice, “And I’m a force to be reckoned with. Now, go to sleep or you’ll feel my wrath.”

Silver quickly pulls the covers over his face, pretending to sleep.

Shadow chuckles, finding it quite adorable. He closes the door and heads over to the bedroom. When he doesn’t see his husband in bed, he raises an eyebrow.

“I thought I was gunna have to swoop in and save Silver for a second there.”

Shadow rolls his eyes and turns around, seeing Sonic sneaking out from behind the bedroom door he had just opened.

“Perhaps you *should* sign up for Rouge’s replacement,” Shadow jokes as he makes his way over to him, “You’ve gotten a lot stealthier over the years.”

“I’m all for it if you’re honestly offering,” Sonic responds confidently, “I wouldn’t mind another adventure.”

Shadow finds his smile faltering a little as a displeased noise leaves his throat.

“Uh-oh,” Sonic places his hands on his hip and stands with his weight on one leg, “I didn’t like the sound of that.”

“Everything is under control, Sonic,” Shadow states before turning toward the bed.

“Okay. Time out,” Sonic responds, holding his hands up like a ref actually calling it time, “How come every time you *say* everything is under control you never *sound* like everything is under control?”

“Sonic,” Shadow hisses out in annoyance, “I had a long day. Please, don’t start this.”

Sonic holds his hands up in defeat, “Alright, alright. Fine. Only because I don’t wanna fall into the nagging house wife stereotype.”

Shadow gives Sonic a stale look, “This is less about stereotypes and more about me overworking myself. It’s my fault. Not yours. After all of this is over, I’m going to be here more. I promise.”

“Alright,” Sonic says with a nod like he means it this time. He slips back into bed and waits to snuggle up to Shadow once he does the same.

Shadow pulls Sonic in by the waist and looks into those radiant emerald eyes, “One more day…”

Sonic smiles back and snickers, “Work getting to you that badly?”

“No,” Shadow shakes his head and lets his finger drag down Sonic’s jaw line whispering seductively, “One more day and you’re mine.”

Sonic’s face glows bright red in the dark and he looks away in embarrassment, “Dude, chill. You’re gunna get me all riled up.”

“Your problem, not mine,” Shadow murmurs darkly and kisses a trail up Sonic’s chest.

Sonic hisses and digs his fingers into Shadow’s shoulder, “Seriously, Shadow. Silver’s probably not even asleep yet.”

Shadow loves the pressure against his shoulder blades and feels himself getting lost in the heat of passion for a moment. He nestles his face into Sonic’s neck before whispering, “Be honest. Do I tell you I love you enough?”

Sonic laughs a little and answers, “Of course you do.”

Shadow wraps his arms around Sonic tightly like he could float away at any moment and states grimly, “I’d be so lost without you, Sonic.”

“Aw, Shadow…” Sonic pets his husband’s head soothingly. Shadow gets like this time and again. When things get too overwhelming or when something triggers an unwanted memory. It breaks Sonic’s heart a little, but he knows he has to be there for him. “I’m not goin’ anywhere,” Sonic tells him sincerely, “You’re gunna come home to me every night. Every single night.”

Shadow nods and lets out a shaky breath. He doesn’t say anything. He just tries desperately to believe those words because they’re the only things he’s hanging onto right now.

## Agent Zero



### Chapter Five: Agent Zero

Silver wakes up at an appropriate time this morning since he remembered to set his alarm clock. He yawns and stretches before he hops out of bed. He drags his backpack behind him as he makes his way down the hall, but stops when he smells something delicious coming from the kitchen.

Silver runs down the steps and almost trips over himself when he sees Sonic cooking breakfast, “D-dad!? You’re awake?” Silver looks distressed and confused before pinching himself a few times to make sure he isn’t sleeping, “I’m dreaming, right? Is this a dream?”

“Nope,” Sonic shakes his head and sets a plate full of eggs and bacon onto the kitchen table, “Growing boys need a healthy breakfast. Breakfast is the most important meal of the day!”

Silver makes his way over to the kitchen and climbs onto the chair, “Is it now? Seems like you’re constantly forgetting the memo.”

Sonic rubs the back of his neck sheepishly, “Yeah, I deserve that. I’ve been kinda slacking a little. You’re right. I need to grow up a little.”

Silver looks conflicted by his dad’s words and mumbles, “I mean, don’t grow up too much.”

Sonic snickers before sitting down, “No worries. I’m still your cool dad, but I wanna make sure you get to school on time and have a proper breakfast and lunch and all of that first.”

Silver smiles a little and finds himself blushing, “Thanks...”



Sonic ruffles the kid's forehead quills and pulls out a pen and paper and begins doodling as he scarfs down his food. Sonic actually makes it an art form how he can multitask like that.

Silver cuts his eggs with the side of his fork and watches the yoke ooze out. His smile widens because they're made just the way he likes them. He dips it into the little yellow puddle and takes a bite out of it. He watches Sonic's pen go to work in a little awe, "Is that your new logo?"

Sonic stops drawing for a moment before swallowing. He spins the paper around and explains, "Yep. Like it? I was goin' for like... vintage modern."

"That makes no sense, dad," Silver responds, trying not to laugh.

"What!? It makes perfect sense!" Sonic says with a pout, "It's gunna be red with white font and..."

"Wait, what? Isn't the cola blue? Why on earth would you make the packaging red?" Silver asks in bewilderment.

"Because red is cool," Sonic states like it's the only explanation he needs. Sonic leers down at Silver feet and slyly asks, "And when are you gunna get some red shoes?"

Silver groans, "Why would I wear red? It doesn't match anything I wear! You're not making any sense."

"Team Sonic wears red," Sonic grumbles, spinning the pad of paper back around as he continues to doodle.

"Sounds like you're the only one on Team Sonic," Silver shoots back, "Pretty narcissistic to name our team after yourself."

Sonic stands up like he's offended, "Did *you* not get the memo? I'm Sonic! Sonic the Hedgehog?"

Silver raises his eyebrow and asks, "So?"

"So!?" Sonic asks like he's horribly insulted. He doesn't argue though. Just murmurs under his breath about the new generation not being alive to witness his awesome-ness—And yes, that's a word. "Okay, I need a catch phrase," Sonic says out loud as he taps the pen against his chin thoughtfully, "Like... Something to do with speed or on-the-go?"

Silver face palms and grits out, "Ugh... Here we go..."

Sonic jumps up out of his seat, "That's perfect!!! Chaos Cola: Here We Go!" Sonic starts writing out the catchphrase in different fonts.

Silver doesn't have the brain capacity to argue with his dad. His design choices are beyond him and he doesn't care enough to try to change his mind. So, he continues to eat breakfast. He can admit one thing though. He likes this. Not rushing in the morning as he listening to his dad's erratic pen strokes as he draws. It was actually really nice.

Silver didn't realize how much socializing he could have been doing with his friends by getting to school early. He mostly just complains about how Mrs. Labyrinth runs her class and his friends who aren't in his class pat him on the back and give him sympathetic looks.

Although Silver knows it's inevitable. He's going to have to go to class soon. All of his friends were already filing out to go to theirs. Silver turns to make his way down the hall, but doesn't see the classmate rushing up from behind. He accidently runs into them and realizes too late that it's Jet.

They bump shoulders and stare at one another for a moment. Silver is sure Jet is going to throw an insult at him, but instead all Jet says is a simple “Excuse me” before heading into the classroom before him.

Silver just stands there feeling a little empty. He doesn’t know why. He supposes it doesn’t matter. Jet couldn’t keep this up until recess. Silver knows he can’t help but gloat about him almost face planting into the ground. A part of him almost hopes he challenges him again.

Silver shakes his head. What was he saying? This was what he wanted. He wanted Jet off his back and here it was.

So, why doesn’t it feel satisfying?

Silver is also surprised Mrs. Labyrinth isn’t badgering him the entire class. Usually, she purposefully picks on him or calls him out for daydreaming, but she doesn’t. Which is fine with him because he spends more time writing in his free time. He knows though. He knows she’ll have her revenge during the parent-teacher conferences. She’d embarrass him in front of his father and his father would get the wrong idea of him and his study habits.

Silver sighs and realizes that maybe he isn’t really afraid of his father. Maybe he’s just afraid of letting him down. He thinks so highly of Shadow. He knows that it’s an unrealistic goal, but he kind of hopes he could be a little bit like him one day.

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Shadow makes his way down to the commander’s office with Zero’s file in hand. He’s looked and relooked it over and so far nothing in his files tell him anything. Other than he lives on the poorer side of Westopolis and that he scored perfect marks in both physical and written tests. He just has to keep Espio’s words in his mind. He needed to find Zero’s motive. He needed to figure out what’s driving him to attack Prison Island.

As he walks into the office, there he is. He’s standing upright like any other soldier before Topaz. Shadow says nothing, just stands next to him and waits for Topaz to speak.

“Agent Zero, I’d like you to meet your new team leader,” Topaz says as professionally as she can, “You are to follow his orders to a T, do I make myself clear?”

“Understood,” Zero responds short and strict like any other soldier would.

Shadow side-glances the jackal and comments in his head about at least acting the part.

Zero turns to Shadow and this is when Shadow really takes a notice to his eyes. In the picture it seemed like he had two different colored eyes, but it’s clear by the scar over his eyelid that he completely lost pigmentation from it in other ways. Physical trauma most likely.

The jackal takes notice to Shadow’s stares and states, “Do not bother yourself with my eye. I may not be able to see through it, but I have my other senses to compensate.”

“Your record speaks for itself,” Shadow responds gruffly before turning away, “That’s all that matters to me.”

A smile graces Zero’s face and it’s a bit over confident, “It is nice to have the one and only Shadow the Hedgehog give me his respects.”

Shadow stops in his tracks when he hears that. He doesn’t even look back as he says, “Don’t

misunderstand me, kid. I know of your skill level in a controlled setting. How you handle yourself on the field is another trial entirely. And you will *earn* my respects just as everyone else has.” He continues walking after he’s sure he’s proven his point.

Zero merely nods back and excuses himself from his commander’s presence. He follows Shadow down the halls at a significant distance. This guy is posed and calm, not at all scared. Shadow isn’t sure if that’s a good or bad sign.

“You wouldn’t mind answering some questions,” Shadow states, his back still facing the other as he walks, “Just part of protocol. We can’t bring you down to Prison Island otherwise.”

“Anything I can do to help,” Zero responds with a nod of agreement.

Shadow glances at Zero from over his shoulder for a moment. No resistance whatsoever. This guy is either cocky or stupid. There’s also the slight chance he’s innocent. Given the picture on his file, he’s not willing to hold his breath.

“We’re headed down to the Central Station PD,” Shadow states, still gazing back at him for a reaction.

“Very well,” Zero nods back, “You will have to excuse me since I am unfamiliar as to where that is.”

“I have a vehicle,” Shadow tells him, “I’ll be escorting you.”

There’s a slight smirk on his face, “I would be honored, Shadow.”

Shadow’s glare hardens and he turns back. Nothing. This guy wasn’t giving him anything.

Shadow doesn’t even have to say the word. He’s on his bike and Zero finds himself right at home, standing on the back of it.

Shadow growls out, “The engine has a kick to it.”

Zero just waves him off, “I assure you, I will be fine.”

And he is. Even as their speeding down the street, Zero doesn’t falter once. He’s just as balanced as Sonic is riding upon the Tornado. It would be impressive if Shadow wasn’t so leery of him.

As they get down to the station, Espio and Vector are waiting outside for them. They make their way inside to a more private area.

“This is detective Espio and detective Vector. They’re private investigators hired on by GUN to work on this case,” Shadow introduces briefly.

“Nice to meet you both,” Zero nods to them respectively.

Espio and Shadow exchange a small look with one another before Espio opens the door to one of the back rooms. There’s a round table in the middle and a hanging light on the ceiling. Other than that, the room is fairly plain.

Espio and Vector sit on one side of the table while Shadow sits on the other side with Zero. Shadow knows to keep his eyes open for any reaction at all during this. It’s an interrogation under the guise of standard procedure.

It’s quiet between the four of them. Vector is surprisingly quiet, but he knows when to let Espio take

charge in situations like this. Espio folds his fingers together on top of the table before beginning, “I guess I should start by asking if you’re aware of the events happening at Prison Island.”

“Only what was stated in the press,” Zero answers without hesitation, “A group of mercenaries planned an attack on Prison Island and killed a GUN soldier.”

“Are you aware the group of mercenaries weren’t human?” Espio asks like he’s carefully choosing his words.

Zero lets out a small laugh and relaxes a bit, “Ah, I get what this is now.”

Espio eyes him like he doesn’t understand.

Zero’s smile widens a bit, showing off his sharp canines, “Do not be afraid to ask me if I am connected to the squad of jackals that killed one of your men, detective.”

Espio’s eyes shift over to Shadow’s as if to silently ask permission. Shadow just sends him one sharp nod. Espio motions his hand to Zero and asks, “Alright. Are you?”

“It is a very long, complicated web of events,” Zero states, his eyes averting away in amusement.

“We have time,” Shadow states gruffly, “You aren’t leaving until we get answers.”

Zero holds his wrists up to Espio and asks, “Would it make you feel more comfortable if you cuffed me in the meantime, detective?”

“Just proceed, Zero,” Espio responds calmly.

Zero lets out a long breath before retreating his hands a bit. He taps his finger onto the tabletop thoughtfully as his sharp nail drags across it, “I was once part of the jackal squad. I know them quite intimately since they were my family.”

“We want names, Zero,” Espio urges him, “Anyone at all who could have done something like this.”

Zero erupts into laughter. It’s mean and bitter and the sound jolts the three a bit from how abrupt it is. “I do apologize,” Zero says around soft chuckles, “Any one of them could be capable of something this heinous. Although... if you are looking for names I will not be of any assistance.”

“So, you’re deciding to take the fall for them?” Espio asks, eyes sharp on him.

“For that radical group of mercenaries? Surely not,” Zero explains in a bitter calm, “You see, Sandopolis operates on an entirely different set of rules than any of you are used to.”

“I am from Press Garden,” Espio offers tightly, “Try me.”

Zero closes his eyes as if reveling in the image of cherry blossoms falling delicately all around him, “Ah... Press Garden. Corrupt government, but a beautiful environment. The off season is not bad either.”

“We’re talking about you, Zero,” Espio reminds him.

“Of course,” Zero nods and places his hands on the table, palms up, as if to say he has nothing to hide, “Sandopolis is a desert. The mornings could scorch the very skin off your bones and the nights are cold as hell. It is a wonder anything could thrive in such conditions. Yet here I am and here *they* are.”

“Names,” Espio shoots back as if getting impatient. Vector glances at Espio as if getting worried by his temper. Espio never shows his temper to anyone.

“Names are irrelevant, my dear detective,” Zero says as if savoring the anger in his eyes.

“Names could be the difference between us catching these murders,” Espio retorts.

“Our names are always changing. Always evolving. Always *growing*. Except mine,” Zero states with a shrug of his shoulders.

Espio stands up suddenly, “Enough games.”

“Wait,” Vector says placing his hand on Espio’s back, “A numerical system. Zero’s name has never changed because nothing’s before zero.”

“And what exactly is your squad counting up to?” Espio asks.

“Kills,” Zero snarls.

Espio slowly sits back down when he hears that, “You expect us to believe that?”

Zero shrugs and sits back in his seat, “Believe what you will, but do I have a face of a man who has won his battles?”

“You were part of a radical mercenary group and never landed a kill,” Espio states like he doesn’t believe it.

“I was *weak*,” Zero says with a feral bite to his voice, “It was not exactly a choice.”

“Is that why you joined GUN?” Espio asks in all seriousness.

“I joined GUN to get stronger, yes. I did not join to raise my kill count,” Zero explains before slowly turning to Shadow, “Besides, it would not be considered a kill if it was done out of self-defense.”

Shadow locks eyes with Zero and murmurs, “Are you implying something?”

“Not at all,” Zero answers sincerely.

“Okay, fine,” Vector says, folding his arms across his chest, “Do you know why this group would wanna target a place like Prison Island? Seems like quite the trek from Sandopolis.”

“The doctor, of course,” Zero responds as if it were obvious.

“The doctor doesn’t know anything about their arrival,” Espio points out.

“Have you seen the markings in Sandopolis? Within their pyramids?” Zero asks with a smirk, “They *look* pretty old and worn, but there is one glaring indicator that they are quite new.”

Espio and Vector look at one another like they don’t know what he’s talking about.

“The doctor is present in those artifacts,” Shadow states, eyes still on Zero, “They weren’t made by the doctor?”

“They were made by my people commissioned by the doctor,” Zero says with a smile like he’s happy Shadow had put the pieces together.

“Why would they agree to that?” Shadow asks.

“We had nothing. The rains were coming less frequent. The rivers were drying up. We had very little resources and our people were dying. The doctor offered us salvation,” Zero explains lightly as if remembering it, “We would work and get scraps in return, but they were still *something*. He came to us right when all hope was lost and we survived. We thrived even.”

“How long ago was this?” Espio questions.

Zero places his finger to his lip and wonders out loud, “How old am I again?”

“Twenty-one,” Espio answers immediately.

“Ah, yes,” Zero says with a laugh like it’s comical, “The years tend to dwindle by unnoticed when something like age in meaningless.” He takes a moment to calculate the numbers in his head before finally giving an answer, “Thirteen years ago? I was about eight. Maybe nine. I worked my muscles to exhaustion, but it did make me stronger. Eventually.”

Shadow gives Zero a concerned look. Eight? This guy was only Silver’s age while he was working himself to near death.

Espio exchanges a stern look with Shadow as if to say not to attached his emotions in this conversation. He turns back to Zero and states, “So, these mercenaries view the doctor as a savior to them. That’s why they’re attempting to break him out.”

Zero shrugs and sighs, “Who knows?”

“Apparently you do,” Espio says back, “Why are we to believe that you aren’t conspiring with them?”

“Me?” Zero asks, pointing to himself as if it’s a joke, “No, I would never serve the doctor. I know the truth.”

“Which is?” Espio asks.

Zero leans back and side-eyes Shadow with a smirk, “I saw the light. I watched as the doctor was viewing the reports of a certain black hedgehog who was meddling around Radical Highway. I knew in my nine-year-old heart that the doctor was not running this show. It was Shadow.”

Shadow slowly turns his head to look at Zero.

“You saved me, Shadow,” Zero says with a pleasant smile, “If not for your release and your plan, I would have been brainwashed into thinking the doctor was some kind of icon to be worshiped. I want to work with you to stop these misguided creatures from their delusional life-long mission. I will make sure they see the truth.”

Shadow’s face drops and he looks away. He doesn’t know how to handle a situation like this. How could it be possible that anyone’s life could be altered for the better because of him? Shadow gets to his feet and says, “Please, excuse me. I’d like to speak with Espio in private.”

“Of course,” Zero responds and motions to Espio.

Espio gets up with Shadow, but not before stopping to whisper to Vector, “Stay here and watch him.”

“Like a hawk,” Vector snickers and leans back in his chair, pillowing his head with his arms.

As they get into the hallways, Espio is pacing back and forth as if he’s fighting with himself, “This doesn’t make any sense. I don’t know what to make of any of it.”

Shadow’s rarely seen Espio this worked up. At least about a case. He stands still and watches the chameleon make his rounds across the tiled floor. He stands with his arms folded and carefully glances back into the room Zero is sitting in. “I don’t think he’s lying about not following the doctor,” Shadow finally says.

“My instincts are telling me he’s lying. About everything. That it’s all a ruse, but…” Espio stops and sighs, “My senses… my heart… it’s saying he’s telling the truth. Or he at least believes the words he’s saying. I can’t get a read on him at all.”

Shadow isn’t sure what sixth sense Espio has, but he knows he can sense things others can’t. The fact that it’s getting disrupted by Zero’s words is bizarre to say the least. Espio can usually tell if a criminal is lying or not almost instantly.

“Be on your guard around him, Shadow,” Espio warns as he glares back into the room, “This truth he speaks of may only exist in his mind. It could be a fabrication of his own warped reality. I’ve put criminals away who still believe themselves to be innocent even after being put behind bars.”

“Good to know,” Shadow responds.

“As of now, we can’t convict him,” Espio explains with a frown, “but as the evidence piles up, we will uncover more of the truth and expose his lies. I’ll see to it personally.”

“Thank you,” Shadow says with appreciation before walking back into the room. He stands in the doorway and exchanges a look with Zero.

Zero doesn’t move. Just watches Shadow as if awaiting an order.

“You’re with me,” Shadow states as he motions for him to get up.

Zero’s smile widens as he gets up. He follows Shadow out the door before speaking to Espio a bit teasingly, “It has been a *pleasure*, detective.”

Espio just looks away with a huff, disregarding him.

“Come on, kid. There’s a chopper waiting for us back at base,” Shadow states impatiently, not looking back once.

Zero follows him gladly, his head held high in a proud manner.

Espio shrinks back a little and whispers quietly, “Be careful, Shadow…”

## Bullies and Rivals



### Chapter Six: Bullies and Rivals

Not once. There's not one instance where Jet calls him a name or sends him a condescending look. Nothing. Silver even waits to watch Jet go after the bell rings. He frowns when the hawk doesn't even look back at him. He shouldn't feel lonely, but he kind of does.

"You're dismissed, Silver," Mrs. Labyrinth reminds him.

Silver nods and packs up his belongings. He slings his backpack over his shoulder and halts. He's almost waiting for her to stop him in his tracks, but she doesn't. So, he continues to walk down the hallway in silence as other kids swarm in and out of his vision.

Silver groans when he sees his dad parked in his usual fire hydrant spot—which at this point should just be labeled Sonic's—as the blue hedgehog is leaning against his car while conversing with a growing group of teachers. Silver notes the one teacher who had come out earlier that week to chastise Sonic is now laughing and giggling with the other teachers. Silver rolls his eyes and opens up the driver's side and crawls over the dash to get into the passenger's seat.

"Byeeee! Good-bye! I'll see you all at parent-teacher conferences! Bye-bye~!" Sonic calls out to them, slowly inching back into the car and rolling the window up to prevent them from talking more. Sonic leans back against the seat and sighs tiredly as he shields his eyes away from the window even though he knows that they're one way.

"Does father know what you're doing?" Silver says with a pout, knowing that what Sonic is doing is bad, but not really knowing to what extent.



“Does Shadow know you were messing with his record player?” Sonic asks a bit snottily before mocking an epiphany, “Oh, wait! He caught you last night, you little gremlin.”

“Uuuuughhhh!” Silver groans out loud and rudely.

Sonic snorts out a laugh and revs the engine of his car, “Hey, you’re playing with fire here. Not me.” They zoom away as the teachers rush out into the street to wave their good-byes and Sonic kind of winces at that. “Okay... My flirting *might* be getting a little out of hand,” Sonic murmurs, resting his arm on the car door as he readjusts the rearview mirror back in place.

“Well... At least I won’t be the only disappointment in father’s eyes that day,” Silver whispers quietly, holding his backpack up to his chest.

“Disa...? Disappointment!? I was just joking, little guy,” Sonic replies a bit surprised.

Silver just hides his face against his backpack and mumbles softly, “I think Jet hates me.”

Sonic blinks a few times. He looks over at Silver with an eyebrow raise, “Whoa! Since when have you cared what Jet thinks? Didn’t you say he was like... *‘the bane of your existence’* or something?”

“He is,” Silver says in a cute little gruff, “He’s dumb and stupid and all of the above.”

“Buuuuut...” Sonic drawls out, egging him on.

“Promise not to tell father?” Silver asks.

“You know me, kiddo. If you don’t get caught, I don’t tell Shad-Dad anything,” Sonic reassures him.

“Well...” Silver mumbles, kicking his feet back and forth a little nervously, “I raced Jet the other day and...”

Sonic clicks the radio off and gives Silver his undivided attention.

“It was *fun*,” Silver says with a small smile to his voice, “I still hate him, but it was fun.”

Sonic’s eyes sparkle when he hears that and he coos out, “Silvy, you have your first rival!”

“My first... what?” Silver asks in confusion.

Sonic pulls out his phone and says, “Siri?”

The phone responds with, “How may I be of assistance?”

“Look up the definition of a rival,” Sonic replies with a smirk.

“Okay,” the robotic voice replies and there’s a moment of silence before she explains, “A person or thing competing with another for the same objective or for superiority in the same field of activity.”

“Thank yooou,” Sonic says in a cocky tone and shoves his phone back into his pocket.

Silver looks down in awe when he hears that and scrunches his eyebrows up with a conflicting look.

“Don’t think too hard. I don’t want you to hurt yourself right as your weekend is starting,” Sonic snickers jokingly.

“But... but he always talks down to me and belittles me and makes fun of me in front of everyone,” Silver says in his defense.

Sonic rubs the back of his neck sheepishly, “Y-yeah...?”

“Why would he do that?” Silver questions like he’s desperate to know.

“W-well...” Sonic answers like he’s being put on trial, “He might... I don’t know? He might like you.”

Silver looks at Sonic as if that’s the most ludicrous thing that’s ever come out of his dad’s mouth. And this is Sonic so that’s saying something. Silver glares at Sonic accusingly, “That’s absurd! If you like someone you shouldn’t make them feel like the dirt under your shoes!”

Sonic’s eyes dart back and forth as he sinks further in his seat. He laughs nervously and turns the radio back on, “Let’s listen to some music!”

Silver’s eyes widen when he sees the guilty look on Sonic’s face and he forcefully turns the radio off again, “You used to do that!? Why!?”

Sonic’s lip twists into a frown and he sighs in defeat, “Because it’s fun to see the other person get mad. Most of the times... they’re like... really cute when they do it.”

Silver’s whole life shatters around him when he realizes what his dad is telling him, “You used to bully father?”

“Used to?” Sonic stifles his laughter.

It’s quiet between them as Silver tries to process this information. He thinks back at all the times Jet was ever mean to him and then he thinks about how angry he got when racing him. This was the absolute worst. Why were friendships so weird and difficult. He never acted like that with Marine. Or any of his other friends.

Silver mumbles quietly to his dad, “Was father your rival?”

Sonic looks ahead of himself, staring out at the horizon with a nostalgic look, “Oh, Silver... Shadow is my greatest rival. I’m as fast as he is powerful. There isn’t a force on earth that could even come close to competing with us. I fell in love with him because he was my other half. He completed me.”

“Would you... feel empty if he were gone,” Silver asks sadly.

Sonic’s smile widens and he rubs his nose with embarrassment as he admits, “I wouldn’t be who I am without him.”

Silver nods and remains quiet for the remainder of the ride. Instead, he thinks back to the events of preschool:

Sonic is holding young Silver’s hand and Silver is clasping tightly onto it. “Go on, Silvy,” Sonic tells him gently.

Silver clasps tighter and says in a scared tone, “What if you don’t come baaack!”

Sonic ruffles his quills and tells him, “I’ll be right here when you get out. You’ll barely know I’m gone.”

Silver sniffles a little and shakes his head, “I don’t wanna! Please, daddy! Don’t make me go!”

Sonic sighs and whispers, "How about I walk you inside and I tell everyone just how *cool* you are?"

Silver looks away unsure.

Sonic nudges him softly, "C'mon. Let's go." He takes Silver's hand and struts inside. "Good morning, everyone!" Sonic announces as he waves at all the kids, "I'm Sonic the Hedgehog and this is my awesome kid, Silver! He's gunna be your classmate!"

The kids aw in silence when they see the blue blur walk in. One starry eyed kid in particular. A certain green hawk with eyes full of wonder. He makes his way over to Sonic and stutters nervously, "Y-you're the world renown hero, Sonic the Hedgehog! Y-you're the fastest thing alive!"

"I sure am, kid," Sonic smiles down at him and asks, "What's your name?"

"I-I'm...uh...*Jet!* Jet the Hawk!" He replies a bit flustered of seeing Sonic in the flesh.

"Wow! That's a *cool* name," Sonic comments, "I bet you're pretty fast too."

Jet shyly looks away and shuffles a little, "N-not as fast as you, Mr. Sonic."

"Please, call me Sonic," Sonic responds with a bright smile, "I have an important mission for you, Jet. Think you're up for it?"

"Of course!" Jet says excitedly.

Sonic guides Silver closer and asks quietly so only the two of them can hear, "My son Silver is a little nervous. Do you think you could take care of him today?"

Jet gives Sonic a determined look, "Yes, I will." Jet goes to reach for Silver's hand and Silver jerks away a little. Jet gives the kid a confused look.

"Aw, come on, Silvy. Jet's nice," Sonic tells him softly, "He's gunna take care of you while I'm gone."

"I don't wanna!" Silver shouts angrily, "I want you! I want you! I want you!"

Sonic gives Silver a sheepish look like he doesn't know what to do.

Jet runs back to his bag and shuffles through it before pulling out two action figures. He smiles eagerly and holds them up to Silver, "If you stay, you can play super heroes with me!"

Silver's tantrum stops when he sees the two plastic figures. One is Ironman and the other is Captain America. His eyes get wide when he sees the super soldier.

Jet grins when he sees he's gotten his attention. He holds Captain America out to him and says, "You can have him. My dad buys me toys all the time. Besides, I like Ironman better."

Silver shyly reaches for the action figure and when he finally takes it, he's smiling. He doesn't say anything, he just goes to follow Jet. He stops when he realizes what he's doing and turns to look back at Sonic.

"Go on, little bud. I'll be here when you get out," Sonic vows.

Silver nods and follows Jet a bit more confidently.

The two get along great for awhile. Silver doesn't really play with his action figure. He just holds it

close to his chest while he watches Jet make his fly around.

The children get into a circle and they all take turns introducing themselves.

Once it gets to Jet, he stands up tall with his chest puffed out as he says, "I'm Jet the Hawk! My dad is a famous treasure hunter and he travels all over the world to collect ancient artifacts! I'm gonna be just like him when I grow up! I'm gonna travel the world in search for silver and gold! We're so rich we have houses all across the globe. I'm currently living on Emerald Coast, but that's just our summer home. I decided I wanted to come here for school because Station Square is where Sonic the Hedgehog lives. He's super cool and one day I'm gonna be just as fast as him!"

The kids all clap for him with big, sparkly eyes and tell him how cool he is. To which Jet revels in the attention.

When it gets to Silver's turn though, he can't seem to talk let alone look anyone in the eye.

"Go on," the teacher says in a pleasant voice, "Tell everyone who you are."

Silver scoots away from the circle and shakes his head.

The kids all look at one another and start whispering.

"What's wrong with him?"

"Why won't he talk?"

"He's really weird."

"Maybe he doesn't like us."

The teacher just smiles pleasantly and tells the shy hedgehog, "Don't worry. We'll come back to you, okay?"

Silver shakes his head and runs away, under one of the craft tables.

Jet raises a brow at him and goes to step forward to confront him.

"Ew! Don't talk to him, Jet," one of the students says.

"Yeah, he's weird," another one exclaims, her face scrunched in disgust.

All of the student erupt in laughter and the teacher tries to calm them all down, "Enough. Those aren't nice things to say."

Jet starts to walk toward Silver anyway, but before he can make it to the table one of the students shouts, "Don't do it, Jet! You'll get infected with his weirdness!"

Jet turns around and shouts, "I'm not weird!"

"Yeah, you are! You wanna talk to the weird kid! You aren't cool!"

Jet feels his limbs freeze. He wasn't cool? No, that's not right. He was cool. He is. Talking to Silver doesn't make him weird, right?

Although the kid's laughter feels like it's getting louder and the pressure of getting his legs to move is getting harder. He didn't want all of the kids to hate him. He didn't want that at all.

Jet curls his fist. No, he *was* cool and he'd prove it to all of them. Jet shouts over to the scared hedgehog, "Hey, Silver!"

Silver looks up with tears in his eyes. He slowly comes out from under the table when he sees Jet. A smile slowly forms on his face.

"For having such a cool dad, you sure are *weird*," Jet mocks with a smirk.

Silver stops, his smiles slowly falling as if he doesn't understand what's going on.

"You must be a real disappointment," Jet says as he stands tall, looking down at him like he's nothing.

Silver feels his muscles twitch.

The kids start laughing louder than ever and the teacher struggles to control them.

Jet looks back at the kids like he's proud he started the chaos. Although when he goes to look back at Silver he pales.

Silver is advancing closer, his eyes staring at him like molten gold threatening to simultaneously burn him alive and harden into a statue. Silver throws the action figure on the ground and on impact sparks a teal coloration before the head and limbs go flying in different directions.

Silver says one thing to Jet, "You're dead." A second later, he's tackling Jet to the ground and pounding his fists into whatever he can get his hands on. Jet is kicking and screaming, trying to fend off the enraged hedgehog, punching back.

Silver doesn't remember much after that. The only thing he really remembers is sitting in a white room until he sees Sonic running through the door with a worried look on his face. He cradles the kid's face in his hands and asks, "Are you okay!?"

Silver looks unsure. He goes to open his mouth to answer, but it snaps shut when he sees his father walking in.

Shadow is like a looming titan over him. His eyes are both surprised and angry as he looks down at his son. His expression says it all. Shadow doesn't say anything. He just points out the door like the threat of disobeying him is death.

Silver swallows and slides off the plastic seat. He walks with Sonic, holding his hand tightly. Sonic holds it back just as tightly. Silver goes to look up at him, hoping to see his reassuring face, but all he gets is Sonic staring forward and looking really unsure himself.

Sonic gets Silver buckled up in the back seat of the car and before Sonic can do anything else, Shadow is pulling the blue hedgehog back outside by the shoulder. Silver winces as the door slams shut, visibly shaking the car. It's a wave of anxiety all at once when he hears his parents fighting back and forth. It's angry and loud and Silver's never heard them scream at each other like this before.

"I told you this was a bad idea! You never listen to me!"

"He needs to have a social life, Shadow! I'm not gunna just have Tails home school him!"

"There are *human* children in there, Sonic! He could have *killed* someone!"

“No, he couldn’t! He’s just a kid, dude! You’re overreacting!”

“All of your negligence is going to get him taken away! Do you want that!?”

“What are you talking about!? He’s not going anywhere! He’s right here!”

“I can’t take this anymore! You’re brash, irrational...!”

“You think you can do a better job!? Do it then! Because you’re all talk! I’m the one raising him! It’s easy to be a critic when you’re not stepping up!”

“I work for us! We wouldn’t have this house if it weren’t for me!”

“So, you’re gunna pull that now? You make some money and all of a sudden everything is yours! Your tone always changes once something goes wrong!”

“If you don’t like it *get out!*”

Silver can’t take it anymore. He holds his ears tightly and screams, begging for it to stop. Silver hiccups on breaths, trying to breathe. He feels like his face is burning and his lungs feel like they’re filled with water. When he goes to open his eyes, he looks up and sees Sonic holding him in his arms. He hears Sonic hushing him softly and rubbing his back.

Shadow is staring at Silver like he doesn’t know what to do. He immediately looks guilty for all the things he’s said though. He motions for Sonic to sit in the back and he pulls the door open before getting in the driver’s seat.

When they get home is when their talk happens. About his punishment and being on watch and having his things taken away.

And Sonic’s words that he’ll never forget.

*“Y-yeah. Sorry, kiddo. I kinda have to agree with Shadow on this one.”*

Except all he can think about were Shadow’s words and how everything he had said must have been true.

Silver feels like he’s responsible for almost tearing his parents apart that day.

# Compromise



## Chapter Seven: Compromise

Shadow's day goes by surprisingly smooth all things considered. Zero has a smugness to him that he usually can't stand, but he never once questions Shadow's orders and follows up with what he says he's going to do. Which is...new to say the least.

The kid is just trying to get on his good side though. He can tell and he won't give him the satisfaction in knowing he's doing better than most rookies on their first day.

Shadow is just happy to get home at a reasonable time today. All the events that lead up to this has made him exhausted. So, if Zero isn't burning down HQ or something, he can deal with him on Monday.

The moment Shadow walks in the door, Sonic is running at him and he winces. He slowly looks up and sees that the blue hero is propping himself up on the corner of the wall in order to trap him in place.

"You're home on time! It's a miracle!" Sonic shouts with excitement.

"I am," Shadow confirms as he wraps his arms around Sonic's waist, guiding off from where he's holding himself up, "and get your feet off the walls. You're going to get them dirty."

"Sorry, I'm just happy you're home," Sonic says sheepishly and wraps his legs around Shadow's torso and holding himself upright by using Shadow's shoulders as a support.

Shadow looks away with a hint of a smile, “As am I.”

Sonic feels his emotions getting too overwhelming because when Shadow does stuff like that he looks so handsome. He can’t help it. He leans down and kisses him tenderly.

Shadow sighs out against Sonic’s lips and kisses back, allowing a hand to trail up his back.

The fridge door closes and Silver appears behind it with a juice box in his hand as he gives them a disgusted look, “Ugh! Could you guys at least wait until I go upstairs to do that?”

Sonic stiffens a little and slowly looks over his shoulder with a guilty look on his face, “We-we weren’t doing anything!”

Silver raises an eyebrow and looks them up and down, noting how Sonic’s feet aren’t even on the ground, still being held up by Shadow’s arms. “Uh-huh...” Silver says like he doesn’t believe him.

Shadow places Sonic down on the ground again because he can tell he’s getting uncomfortable by this. He folds his arms across his chest and challenges, “I don’t believe you cleaned up your video games from the living room like I asked you.”

Silver pops the straw into his juice box and slurps rather loudly from it before pointing out, “It’s the weekend. I’m allowed to play video games on the weekend, remember?”

Shadow growls and looks away.

“I’m leaving. I’m leaving,” Silver calls out as he makes his way back up the stairs to his bedroom, “I’m also listening to your record player to drown out any and all icky noises!”

Shadow just rolls his eyes, but doesn’t argue.

“All things considered, you seem to be in a good mood,” Sonic says with a smile as he ignores his son’s sassy attitude.

“Am I?” Shadow asks, legitimately wondering how he would normally act upon coming home.

Sonic’s face scrunches up as he stifles a laugh like Shadow’s joking.

He isn’t, but he enjoys Sonic’s laugh so he doesn’t question it further, “Mh. Could be because the rookie I was assigned isn’t completely incompetent.”

Sonic smirks at him with mock surprise, “Wow! Not totally trashing on one for once? They must be good.”

“Zero,” Shadow confirms as he makes his way into the kitchen.

“And you remembered their name,” Sonic says as he follows Shadow tsking the whole way like he’s disappointed in him, “Who are you and where is the *real* Shadow?”

Shadow opens the cabinet and grabs one of the glasses before filling it with water from the sink. He leans against the counter and sips it thoughtfully before saying, “It’s strange. I know he’s dangerous and a potential liability...”

“But,” Sonic says, encouraging him to continue.

“He said he was conditioned to believe the doctor to be some kind of savior and that...” Shadow focuses his eyes downward as if he’s confused himself, “I helped him see the truth. He signed up for



GUN because of me.”

Sonic’s eyes widen when he hears that like his mind is blown. Sonic grabs one of Shadow’s hands like he’s proud of him and says, “Dude, you have a fan!”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Shadow shakes his head and takes another sip to hide the embarrassed look on his face.

“Aw, man! This is great,” Sonic says with excitement and nudges Shadow playfully, “I think we finally have enough people in the Shadow Fan Club for me to start printing out membership cards!”

A laugh hitches in Shadow’s chest and he pushes Sonic back like he can’t handle his teasing, “Stop it. Now you really *are* being ridiculous.”

Sonic can’t help but snicker because he loves getting Shadow to laugh. Even if a little. “But that’s great. I’m glad everything is working out for you at work,” Sonic says sincerely this time, “I had a feeling it was only a matter of time until things started falling into place.”

“I suppose,” Shadow responds with a shrug.

There’s a loud shredding of guitars coming from Silver’s room and Shadow immediately tenses up before running up the stairs, “No, Silver! Not that one!” He runs up the stairs and shuts off the record player before the hardcore lyrics can start pouring out of the sound system.

Needless to say, Shadow made it his new mission to go through his box of records and make sure Silver wasn’t listening to anything with an explicit warning on it.

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Blaze comes over early than she usually does. Meaning, Sonic is still face first in bed and Shadow is making sure Silver has all of his things together in his little overnight backpack.

Silver and Marine chant at Blaze “Uncle Miles” over and over until she agrees, but tells them that there’s an exception. They have to agree to eat breakfast first. Which neither one is really opposed to.

Shadow watches Silver go, trying to hide a small frown at how the child looks up at Blaze all starry eyed. He tries not to let it get to him though.

“You shoulda seen him, mom! He was like *Woosh!* And *Wooooosh!* And then he almost beefed it!” Marine shouts excitedly, being the loudest voice in the small diner.

“Oh, really,” Blaze sits poised as she takes a sip from her coffee, raising an eyebrow at Silver.

Silver looks away a bit sheepishly and rubs the back of his neck, “In my defense, it was my first time riding on one. That’s why I want to build one myself.”

Marine leans in front of Silver and spouts out, “With my help!”

“Ah, I see. So, you’re trying to fix the bullying problem on your own? That’s very admirable, Silver,” Blaze compliments with a nod.

“Uh...” Silver’s face drops a little and looks away.

“Oh, Jet stopped buggin’ him. He’s doin’ this for himself now! Right, Silver?” Marine nudges him.

Silver sits quietly and sips his chocolate milk through a straw.

“Don’t stir up the water, Silver,” Blaze warns him.

“Me? I’m not... *No*,” Silver says defensively as he blows little milk bubbles in his drink.

Blaze’s tail flicks with irritation because she can tell when Silver is lying to her. Her posture alone tells him that he’d better come clean about what he’s planning.

Silver sighs and releases the straw from his mouth. He sits back in the booth and pouts a little, “Alright, fine... I’m going to try and challenge him again.”

“Why?” Blaze asks like she’s appalled by his words, “You had won. You got what you wanted.”

“Maybe it’s not what I want...ed,” Silver says, wincing at his own words.

“Must I remind you that this boy has hurt you in the past?” Blaze states.

“No, you don’t have to remind me. It’s clear in my mind. It’s just...” Silver shrugs his shoulders and asks, “Maybe... there’s a small possibility we could become friends?”

Blaze sighs and presses her fingers to her temple in irritation, “Silver, don’t be so naive. Bullies are bullies for a reason. If you encourage him, things will go back to the way they were before. Do you want that?”

“But...!” Silver says in defense, “He... Um...!”

Marine cuts in, “He wants to show him what he’s made of! Silver isn’t gonna accept a pity win! He’s gonna win on his own terms!”

Silver blinks at Marine before her words register, “Y-yes! What she said!”

Blaze looks exasperated for a moment before smiling because she finds it rather cute. She shakes her head and just says, “Fine, but you’re dealing with the repercussions.”

Silver smiles when he hears that. That’s what he loves about Blaze. She warns him, but never pushes him out of his own decisions. Even if he is making a mistake, he was making it for himself and he would learn from it on his own.

Tails is surprised to say the least when he sees his nephew at the door giving him a determined look while trying his best to politely ask to use his workshop. The fox can’t help but laugh at it because it’s adorable.

“Of course, Silver. You’re more than welcome,” Tails tells him and opens the door.

Silver bolts into the door, but stops himself and turns back around like he’d almost forgotten to thank him and returning his trek toward the workshop. Marine follows suit right after.

Blaze tries to apologize for their behavior, but Tails is used to it by now. “At least he thanks me,” Tails tells her as he offers her a seat on his couch, “Sonic bursts in all the time uninvited. Sometimes he just comes over while I’m not here and just waits for me impatiently like I should be at his beck and call.”

Blaze places her hand to her mouth as she laughs lightly, “I guess in some respects Silver is a little more mature.”

“A little?” Tails snickers, “Have you *met* my brother?” He sits back and rests his arm against the headrest of the sofa. He sighs a little and thinks back to when Sonic used to live here, “I don’t mind

the company though. Sometimes this house is a little too quiet.”

“You sound like a mother whose son left the nest,” Blaze says jokingly.

Tails laughs with her, but settles down after a moment. “Jokes aside, Sonic has matured a lot since Silver,” Tails muses softly, “I mean, he’s always been a hero and someone I looked up to, but when it came to actual responsibilities it was awful. He didn’t even know how to take care of himself. I remember when we first met. I was getting bullied by these awful kids on the island I lived on, but Sonic just bursts out of the bushes and scared ‘em off.”

“Bullied you for what exactly?” Blaze asks out of curiosity.

Tails points at his tails, “Two tails. It was weird and unheard of. I mean, I guess...? On an island full of anthropomorphic animals I guess that’s what weird is. I didn’t have any friends. So, I put all of my energy into making things. Sonic was smart though. Not in the traditional sense, but he knew one thing: How to get around efficiently.” He smiles when he thinks of the memory and continues, “He couldn’t talk. Well, he could make these little noises like grunts and stuff, but when it came to facial expressions and physically doing things he was great. So, I’d decipher what he was saying through charades for awhile and he taught me that I could use my tails as a propeller to go fast. And... it worked! The one thing I thought was my shortcoming became my greatest strength because not only could I keep up with him, I learned how to *fly* too.”

“That’s wonderful,” Blaze comments, legitimately impressed.

“Yeah, he inspired me to keep doing better,” Tails continues before letting his smile drop, “Although, he came from a different island. He must have used some parts from Eggman’s base to construct a plane. When I found that out I realized that there was so much more to my world that I have yet to discover. I helped him make adjustments to his plane so we could travel longer and farther, but Eggman must have tracked and followed him because he started attacking my island next. Although... I didn’t realize how many man made things already existed on my island. All I knew is that we needed to get out. It took a lot of time and patience...and run ins with Eggman, but we finally reached civilization. We made it to Station Square and I’ve lived here ever since.”

“That’s quite the journey,” Blaze points out with concern.

“You know Sonic,” Tails says with a sheepish look, “He never gives up.”

Blaze nods and finds her smile growing a little. She knew that firsthand.

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“Alright. So... this is a lot more complicated than I thought it would be,” Silver says as he has a bunch of blueprints rolled out and currently has one in his hands that he’s turning every which way to figure out which way is up.

Marine has a pile of different parts in her arms and she lets them drop onto the floor. Some of the parts roll onto the blueprints laying out. “Complicated. Schomplicated. This’ll be a snap! Have ya ever played Tetris?”

“Yes,” Silver nods his head and watches her trying to shove pieces together, “Have *you*?”

Marine stops what she’s doing and sends Silver a look.

Silver pulls the blueprint up so it’s hiding his face, “Look. All I’m saying is that maybe we should have some kind of plan? It looks like a lot of hard work goes into my uncle’s inventions. I don’t

think we can just put a bunch of stuff together and expect it to run properly.” Silver shrinks back a little self-conscious, “That and it would be kind of embarrassing if it broke down in front of everyone and I had a repeat of last time...”

“I think you’re over thinking this, Silver,” Marine says impatiently.

“Maybe I’m not over thinking it. Maybe you’re not thinking about this enough,” Silver shoots back, but stops after he realizes what he’s saying. He mulls over it for a moment before dropping the blueprint in his hand. “Maybe I am over thinking this,” he reasons before making his way over to Marine, “I think we need to meet each other in the middle and compromise.”

Marine places her hands on her hips and says proudly, “So, you *are* agreeing with me!”

Silver sighs and folds his arms over his chest, “What I’m saying is that neither one of us is a skilled enough mechanic. So, we figure out something we can realistically build.”

“Hmm...” Marine says pensively as she looks around, “Well, there *is* a lot of unfinished stuff in here.”

Silver’s smile widens when he hears her say that, “Now we’re riding the same brain wave.” He turns to the machines hanging about. A lot of them are dusty and look to have been not touched in years. Silver spots what appears to be an old engine of a plane. There’s a medium sized divot in the middle and looks peculiar. It’s almost in the shape of a diamond. Silver goes to touch it and there’s a teal spark that appears.

“Whoa! Blimey, is that still active?!” Marine asks in awe. She makes her way over and goes to touch it, but nothing happens. She frowns at that, “Doesn’t seem to wanna work for me.”

Silver touches it again and the teal spark comes back, but it’s a brighter aura as he presses his palm against it. The engine hums to life a moment later and he smirks, “It doesn’t matter. As long as it turns on when I need it.” Silver scoops the part up into his arms and rests it on an empty table.

Marine shrugs it off and looks around for more parts, “We need something flat so you can stand on it.” Her face lights up when she sees a severed metal wing and drags it over, “How about this?”

“Good enough,” Silver says as he takes it from her. He places it on the table and with the engine, giving it a calculative look, “Okay, but how are we going to put the engine onto the board.”

Marine raises her hand excitedly like she knows, “My moms used to work on stuff together all the time! Fire Mom can use flames and stick it together!”

“Oh, excellent! Blaze can melt an alloy to join these two metal surfaces together,” Silver explains further, “Good thinking.”

Marine blushes and looks proud of herself.

They rush back inside and tell the two adults their plan. They agree to it. Tails provides the alloy and Blaze melts it with her pyrokinesis.

“It looks a little rough,” Blaze comments as the two kids are setting it up outside.

Tails just laughs and says to her, “That’s okay. They’re still learning. Rome wasn’t built in a day.”

“Do you think it will fly?” Blaze asks wearily.

“I doubt it,” Tails responds, “That engine was used for my old Tornado Two. The energy source came from a Chaos Emerald. So, it only runs on chaos energy.”

“Why did we agree to help make it though?” Blaze questions like she’s confused.

“Trial and error,” Tails explains, “That’s how most of my projects go. If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.”

They watch as Silver and Marine prop the board up onto two large cinderblocks. Silver wobbly gets on, but catches himself before he can fall. Marine takes a step back and Silver gives her a thumbs up. He reaches back to the engine and it begins to glow teal before it begins to hover off the ground.

Tails sees this slack jawed like he can’t believe it.

“Oh, look. It worked,” Blaze states as if something like this could be an everyday occurrence.

Tails bursts out the door of his workshop, “How are you doing that!?”

Silver gets startled by his uncle’s reaction and loses his balance.

Blaze sees this and boosts out the door with fire rocketing off her feet, catching Silver before he can fall. She gently places him back onto his feet and turns to Tails who is looking the board over in disbelief.

“H-how can something like this run without an energy source?” Tails questions as he flips the board around and knocks his knuckle against it.

“The engine,” Silver answers simply, pointing to said engine.

“But there’s nothing energizing the engine,” Tails responds like someone just proved that quantum physics was false.

“No, I mean...” Silver makes his way over to the board and presses his finger against the engine, “It reacts to me when I touch it.” He pulls his hand away and then back on and then away. He lifts his foot and presses the sole of his shoe against it. Every single time he comes in contact with it, it hums to life.

Tails slowly puts the board down and redirects his attention to Silver. He looks down at the golden rings around his wrists before he looks back at the engine. He turns away and winces when he realizes what’s happening. The chaos energy inside of Silver’s body was being transmitted into the engine every time he interacted with it. He wonders if this has something to do with Silver being half of Shadow. Shadow’s rocket shoes must be made of similar technology and Tails was able to recreate it by studying the properties of the Chaos Emeralds. It wasn’t impossible. It’s known that as technology advances does so at a similar rate. So, two different people studying the same object could come up with similar conclusions. That’s why inventors had to copyright their inventions. Science was prone to evolving at the same rate.

“Is something wrong?” Blaze asks when she notices how quiet and distant Tails had suddenly gotten.

Tails glances back at Silver. He isn’t sure if he should tell him what’s happening. Sonic and Shadow had both brought up really good points about not wanting to inform Silver of his abilities until he’d gotten a little older. He might start experimenting with his powers and that could be dangerous while he’s in a school setting around human children.

Tails smiles sheepishly and says, “Looks like it’s a rare phenomenon where it just... works! I guess you got lucky, Silver. Good job!”

Silver’s eyes get big and his smile widens. Knowing he did something well and that Tails was complimenting him was a grand achievement. “Thank you,” Silver says with appreciation.

Tails claps his hands together and goes to change the subject, “Everyone has worked so hard today! How about we take and break and I’ll make PB&J sandwiches!”

Marine jumps up and down, “Yes! I want mine shaped like triangles!”

“Say please,” Blaze reminds her authoritatively.

Marine gives her a big, sheepish grin and scuffs her foot on the ground, “Please?”

“Better,” Blaze says with a frown, like she’s on thin ice.

“Of course,” Tails says happily as he guides them back into his home, “Right this way!”

## Sweet Heat



### Chapter Eight: Sweet Heat

Shadow loses himself in the time. He hadn't been able to go back to sleep after Silver had left and he didn't want to wake Sonic. He's come to realize over the years that taking care of the house and Silver were a job in of itself. And since Sonic isn't much of a morning person anyway, waking up that early 5 days out of the week could get exhausting.

So instead, he finds himself in the garage with his record player at a dull roar just to take his mind off things and keep his jittery hands active.

He's tightening his loose kickstand and cursing at how some of the screws are starting to become stripped. He figures he needs to be a little more careful with it or he's going to have to replace the whole thing soon. He just has a nasty habit of kicking it down out of anger. One he's sure he's not going to grow out of anytime soon.

He tosses the screwdriver down in irritation and sits back a little. This was becoming less of a stress relief and more of a chore. He starts to wonder if he should give up on it entirely when he feels two hands slide up his shoulders and begin massaging them. He leans into the touch and allows his eyes to lull closed.

Sonic leans in and whispers against his cheek, "Man...you really need to learn to relax, Shadow. You're muscles are so *tense*."

Shadow winces and lets out a grunt as he feels Sonic working at one of the knots in his back. He wasn't wrong. He's been on edge lately. Ever since this madness began on Prison Island, he hasn't

really had the luxury to relax. Even now that he isn't on the clock he's finding it rather hard to do so.

Although this is helping. A little.

"Let me guess, Silver already left and you're holed up in here because you didn't wanna wake me up," Sonic says with a soft snicker.

Hit the nail right on the head. Shadow isn't going to admit he's right though.

"You know, Shadow," Sonic begins as he presses into his back and lets his hands slide up Shadow's chest, "I kinda miss the days when you *did* wake me up." Sonic's voice is a bit more seductive and the point he's trying to get across is clear.

Shadow breathes in, basking in the little touches and Sonic's voice jogging his memories of more sensual acts. He glances down when he sees red instead of peach arms and it's dawning on him what Sonic is wearing. Shadow runs a hand up Sonic's red clad arm and comments, "Seducing me into riding my bike isn't going to work. I bought you your own vehicle for a reason."

Sonic leans in closer and pouts, "That's just like you... You always think I want something out of you."

"Am I wrong," Shadow asks, glancing over to see his husband's head peeking closer. His tone is daring Sonic to prove him wrong.

Sonic leans in and whispers into his ear, "Maybe I don't wanna ride your bike. Maybe I wanna ride something *else*."

Shadow feels his insides flare to life and he bites his lip. He looks away so he doesn't give Sonic the benefit of seeing that his will power is crumbling apart and he's completely enraptured by the idea.

It doesn't matter though. Sonic's hands are on his shoulders and back again, loosening him up as he continues hotly, "I know you had a stressful week. So, let me take care of *everything*."

Shadow winces, feeling the coil in his abdomen tighten. It's like he doesn't get a say, nor does he really want one as his body being guided up. He feels Sonic press him against the seat of his bike and his back meets where it curves up. He feels almost brainless like he doesn't know how to get the synapses to work in his mind to move or anything else as he sees Sonic above him in his skintight racing outfit. He does take into account his hands rising without him telling them to and letting the pads of his fingers slide against the soft material up to Sonic's chest.

Sonic closes his eyes to take in the sensation fully. He guides Shadow's hand to the zipper and allows him to pull it down a portion of the way. When his eyes open again, he's smirking down at Shadow before climbing onto the seat just above his body.

Shadow growls, their hips aligned yet not exactly touching. It's irritating. It's mind numbing. He's even more tense than he's ever been. "Tease," Shadow spits out like it's an insult.

Sonic doesn't see it that way though. "I'm just getting as much of that pent up energy out of you as I can," Sonic comments deviously, "It's not *my* fault you waited until you were taut as a bowstring before doin' anything about it."

"I don't exactly have time to *fix* that problem," Shadow mutters back with anger.

"Just sit back and relax," Sonic assures him mischievously, "Enjoy the ride. I know *I* will."



Shadow can feel another insult making its way up his throat, but all that really comes out is a soft groan when Sonic's hips grind down against his lap. His hands rest against Sonic's hips on instinct and his fingers cling at the material. "Take this off," Shadow orders tightly.

"Shhh..." Sonic hushes him by resting a finger to his lips, "You'll get what you want. Be patient." Sonic grounds his hips against Shadow's again and revels in the dark hedgehog's slightly dazed eyes. The act causes the opening of his suit to delicately fallback a little, exposing part of his chest and shoulder.

"Patient," Shadow lets out a breathless and bitter laugh, "And what would *you* know about patience?" His fingers dig into Sonic's hips when he feels the contact between them again. His eyes rove down to where a certain spot is getting particularly tight as he can see the outline clearer against the taut material.

Sonic just smiles down at him and leans in to kiss him tenderly. He lets out a soft moan when he feels one of Shadow's arms hold him affectionately, pulling him in closer. "If you've taught me anything," Sonic whispers to him, "it's that waiting makes everything that much more *fun*." His hips dip down once more and he clenches his teeth when he sees Shadow's mouth slack, fighting back a moan. "Why do you think I wait for you, Shads?" Sonic questions teasingly, "Making love to you is *worth* it."

Shadow grits his teeth. Sonic is testing him and he hates it. He's seeing how long he'll keep this up. He just wants Sonic right now. He's *aching* for him and it's torture and Sonic is acting like this is a game. "I want you," Shadow snarls out, his fingers grasp the fabric fallen open against his pale chest and pulls him forward into a rough kiss. He delves his tongue into Sonic's mouth, needing to feel some kind of heat. Sonic's mouth is fighting back though and their tongues go to war.

Shadow's hands bite at Sonic's hips and Sonic's hands grip Shadow's wrists to stop him. Shadow continues to fight back, but Sonic's body on his stops him. Sonic grounds his hips down once more, applying enough pressure that it causes them both to retreat from their kiss and moan desperately.

"Enough games," Shadow growls out in a demanding voice.

Sonic takes a moment to recover before his smirk is in full bloom on his face again, "Maybe I'd give it to you if you were less bossy."

Shadow is shaking with anger, trying not to lose his mind from this strain. "My body is *screaming* for you," Shadow retorts with a hiss, his jaw tense with each word.

"Is it?" Sonic asks like he hadn't noticed.

"Fine," Shadow grumbles as his hand slides from Sonic's hip down his front, "There are other ways of getting what I want."

Sonic raises an eyebrow at him until he feels it. Shadow's hand palming him through the suit. There's a slight look of panic on Sonic's face before it contorts into a moan. Sonic winces as he feels his suit getting tighter and he gives Shadow an irritated look, "Don't do it."

Shadow applies more pressure and winces when he feels Sonic's movements over him getting more wild. He can hold out though. He can take it. "Take it off," Shadow warns him, "Or you're spending this afternoon cleaning it."

"Jerk," Sonic comments in a strained tone which only earns him more pressure as Shadow gropes him through the suit. Sonic throws his head back and lets out a loud moan.

Shadow licks his lips. He loves when he gets loud like this. Maybe this was a little fun. He pulls his hand away and eyes the small dark spot between Sonic's legs, letting out a hungry noise. His fingers dig into Sonic's hips and pull them up.

"Sh-Shadow, what are you doing!?" Sonic asks as he looks down at the dark hedgehog who's face is inching closer to his abdomen.

"Having...*fun*," Shadow murmurs against the wet spot and breathes in Sonic's erotic scent before nuzzling against it.

Sonic props his hands on top of Shadow's head and grits his teeth, "If you do that, Shadow... I'll... I'll..." His tone is dripping with a warning.

"You'll...?" Shadow retorts darkly before licking a hot stripe up Sonic's groin. He closes his eyes and revels in the desperate cries of Sonic, loud in his ears. "You'll beg for mercy? You'll fall to pieces under my hand? You'll lose yourself completely?" Shadow lists off for Sonic to choose.

"I'll take the stupid suit off, okay!?" Sonic shouts out heatedly, clutching harder onto Shadow's head.

Shadow wants to keep pushing him. He wants revenge for what Sonic was attempting to do to him. Although even more than that, he just wants *him*. So, Shadow pulls away and sits back against the seat patiently.

Sonic zips the suit open and he kind of struggles with pulling it off. He never thought this would be a double edge sword. He thought he'd have the high ground. Nope. Not with Shadow. Never with Shadow.

Shadow sighs and sees Sonic taking his loss harshly. So, Shadow gently helps him peel the article of clothing away, lifting his hips so Sonic can maneuver a little easier.

The red racing suit drops to the floor and Shadow braces his leg on the ground so their combine weight isn't on the faulty kickstand any longer. Despite how much tension there was before, both are silent and staring into each other's eyes. Sonic is scooting closer and Shadow is guiding him forward.

Shadow's body is still aching for Sonic and it's clear the feeling is mutual now. Sonic slowly eases down and Shadow's fingers squeeze at Sonic's hips as he feels himself encased in that beautiful heat. They moan in unison as they lock into place.

"How long has it been?" Shadow whispers breathlessly. It's felt like an eternity since he's felt this.

"About three weeks," Sonic grunts out before relaxing, "Give or take a few days."

"Damn..." Shadow murmurs, cursing himself for going touched starved for that long.

It's better than the one time a few years back when he ignored Sonic's advances and vice versa for three months and civil war almost broke out in their home before Sonic barricaded themselves in the downstairs bathroom just so they didn't destroy each other. That was a bit too long of a wait and it was so intense that it really wasn't satisfying. They learned from that experience.

Although this wasn't too bad. It's just a little past overdue.

"Are you alright?" Shadow whispers because he's waiting for Sonic to move and he usually does by now.

Sonic nods quickly, “Yeah, yeah... Just a little snug.”

Shadow swallows thickly and nods. It was true. Sonic was definitely *tight*. He helps Sonic spread his legs a little more and helps support him with his hands.

Sonic feels the little bit of slack from the action and he looks down at Shadow graciously. Sonic begins to move now and they’re both a bit more relieved by the notion. After a moment of getting used to it, Sonic says thoughtfully, “Ya know, I was thinking...”

Shadow grunts looks up at Sonic like he isn’t sure he’s serious. Is he really starting up a conversation right now when he’s on the brink of losing his mind? Shadow just sighs and gives in, “What could you *possibly* be thinking about right now?”

“We should do something today,” Sonic continues, his breath hitching for a moment before cooling down a bit.

“We *are* doing something,” Shadow replies a bit irritated.

“No. Yeah, I know,” Sonic responds as if their having a normal conversation, “but it’s been awhile since we’ve gone out and *done something*.”

Shadow groans and glances up at Sonic once more like he still isn’t sure he’s serious about this. “Did you take your medication this morning,” Shadow asks through clenched teeth.

Sonic shoots Shadow a look that immediately makes Shadow shut his mouth, “Dude, I’m not having an ADD moment. I’m being serious.”

Shadow’s chest tightens as he feels Sonic’s body tensing around him as a result of the agitation. Shadow lets out a breath to try and calm himself down before caressing Sonic’s thigh with his thumb in a soothing manner. “I promise we’ll talk about this after,” Shadow bargains.

“Okay,” Sonic nods in agreement although he seems put off by it. His mind doesn’t linger on it though because he can feel Shadow’s hips thrusting up into him to help with the friction. His eyes threaten to close and a moan rises from his throat.

Shadow is just grateful that it’s enough to distract Sonic from his derailed train of thought and he’s back on track now. He pushes into him once more and Sonic’s hands brace themselves onto his shoulders. Shadow’s eyes get heavy as Sonic’s hips move up and down faster because of it, feeling himself slide in and out of that tight heat.

Sonic hisses and his fingers clench onto Shadow’s shoulders as he complains, “You’re so...*big!*”

Shadow rubs Sonic’s thigh with his thumb once more to ease him. “It’s been awhile,” Shadow reminds him softly, “You’re just tight, love.”

Sonic just groans in response as his legs begin to shake.

“Allow me to elevate the problem,” Shadow murmurs as he repositions Sonic with his arms. He angles his hips and pushes in once more with purpose.

Sonic nearly doubles over from it and chokes on his breath. Shadow is firmly pressed against the sensitive bundle of nerves within him and feels his mind turn to cotton. “Again,” Sonic gasps out breathlessly, “Again, please.”

Shadow nods to him when he’s sure Sonic is ready. He picks up a steady rhythm, helping to guide

Sonic's hips in time. He winces as he feels Sonic taking it more willingly. So it's deeper and tighter. A low rumble in his chest, between a moan and a growl, bubbles up to his lips physically feeling Sonic stretching and loosen around him.

Sonic is smirking down at Shadow through clenched teeth and it hitches slightly each time he hits home. Sonic's eyes are blown and full of lust as he says a bit strained, "Ah... I love you, dude. Fuck, you just...!" Sonic closes his eyes and lets out a loud moan like he can't hold it back before he continues, "You feel so good. You feel so... Ngh!"

Shadow just watches Sonic above him in awe. He loves this man. He loves that he can't hold still and loses himself to this feeling so freely. Shadow can't even speak. He just nods once because he can't help but agree. Sonic feels good. He feels really, really *good* and that's all his mind can really process right now.

Shadow's eyes cast down momentarily when he feels a dampness on his abdomen. Sonic's erotic scent hits his nose and he instinctively pushes up into him, feeling the dampness intensify. Sonic lets out a straggled cry in response and Shadow wraps his hand around the weeping member, beginning to pump it in time. He feels the slickness against his fingers and squeezes on the upward stroke, watching as more drips down his knuckles.

"Sh-Shadow! Shadow... I...!" Sonic cries out in ecstasy.

Shadow rubs his thumb against the slit, smudging the sticky substance that was once gathering there. Shadow's eyes cast back up at Sonic who is giving him a pleading look. Shadow's depths smolder with want as he demands huskily, "Give me your release."

Sonic's breath shudders in his chest before completely letting go in Shadow's hand. He leans into Shadow, pressing his face into his neck as he moans loudly like he couldn't hold it back even if he tried.

Shadow smirks, feeling Sonic's entire weight on him and he cums deep within those fluttering walls. His hand returns to Sonic's hip and squeezes, feeling the sticky aftermath of Sonic's release between his fingers as he does so. He guides Sonic's hips into a steady rhythm, letting those quivering walls milk him out of his orgasm.

Once his muscles go taut and then release in a loose afterglow, he holds Sonic tenderly against him. Shadow feels Sonic's labored breaths against his shoulder and their chests rise and fall in unison. Shadow furrows his brow and tightens his hold on Sonic, just wanting to feel him this closely for a little longer.

Sonic's breathless laugh tickles Shadow's neck and he cranes his head to try to look at him, "Don't ruin this. Please."

Sonic shakes his head, "I'm not. It's just... I didn't think you'd actually let me ride you on your bike." Sonic's laughter comes out a little louder this time.

"Mh..." Shadow stares up at the roof of the garage, eyeing the loose piece of plywood he's been meaning to fix before sighing, "I'd be lying if I said the thought never occurred to me."

Sonic pulls back suddenly to look down at Shadow, "Are you serious!?" He scoots in closer and snickers, "What other dirty thoughts are in your head?"

"My mind is a dark place I don't want you nor anyone else delving into," Shadow warns him sternly.

"Whatever you say, Shads," Sonic remarks dismissively like it's a joke and leans down to make a

pillow out of Shadow's chest. Sonic doesn't say anything after that though. He allows the moment to feel light and personal. He listens to Shadow's beating heart slow gradually as his does the same.

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"I'm not wearing this," Shadow says gruffly as he turns away from the outfit laying on the bed.

"Aw, c'mon! Just try it on," Sonic responds already dressed in his own casual clothes.

"You and those clothes," Shadow comments with a snarl, "What has that school done to you?"

"I mean...yeah, it takes some getting used to," Sonic states as he stretches his legs a little while he feels the fabric of his pants folding over with his movements, "but it's not all bad. Besides, you're gunna have to get used to it because you'll need to wear them when we go to Silver's parent-teacher conference."

Shadow glances down at the clothes in disdain, "I'm required to go?"

"Well... considering you're Silver's dad..." Sonic begins to say like he's somehow doing the math, but deadpans when he finishes, "...yeah."

Shadow turns away and lets out a huff.

"Here," Sonic offers as he pulls a shirt over Shadow's head and stifles his laughter when Shadow's arms are still crossed underneath the fabric.

Shadow is giving him a death glare, "These pieces of material are restrictive and aren't idealistic for combat."

Sonic nods like he sees where he's coming from before replying with some attitude, "Good, good... because you won't be *punching* anyone out while we're on our date."

Shadow breathes out a small laugh and pulls his arms through the sleeves before saying, "With your flirting? Don't hold your breath. I might have to do more than punch someone."

"Stop it," Sonic says with a pout as he holds his ring finger up, "See this? I'm only loyal to *you*."

Shadow rolls his eyes and pulls on the black jacket that's laying on the bed before stating, "You do an awful lot window shopping."

"Dude, come on!" Sonic says with his hands on his hips and his foot tapping impatiently, "I'd never cheat on you! So, don't suggest that I would!"

"If I'm using the term correctly," Shadow retorts as he pulls on the restrictive pants before zipping them up, "Window shopping isn't cheating." He lets the shirt fall over the waistband and looks himself over in defeat.

"Shadow..." Sonic says like he's visibly upset, "I'd never hurt you. We've been together for more than ten years. We have a life together. A family."

Shadow nods, but doesn't look at Sonic directly, "I know."

It's quiet between them for a moment and Sonic feels obligated to make his way over to his husband. He places a hand on Shadow's face and guides it so he can look into his eyes. "I mean it," Sonic says sincerely, "I love *you*."

Shadow nods back a bit more confidently this time. He takes Sonic by the hand and leads them out of the bedroom. As he grabs his keys to his bike and allows Sonic to wrap his arms around his torso as they drive away, he can't help but feel like this could be his fault. Maybe he doesn't give Sonic the attention he deserves.

*The Rose Café* has a cutesy cursive font and an adorable stylized logo of Amy's face on the signage of the building as they walk in. The décor is pretty one-note and it looks like the inside of a Hallmark store around Valentine's Day.

Shadow leans out of the way of a hanging heart shaped decoration and he mumbles quietly to Sonic, "It's pretty ironic that you're taking us on a date to the owner of a café who you vehemently, for lack of better words, don't care for."

"I come for the ambiance not the service," Sonic responds with his nose in the air.

Shadow flicks one of the hanging hearts in Sonic's direction and chuckles when it hits him dead on in the face. "Ambiance, huh," Shadow teases before shaking his head.

"Alright, *fine*," Sonic caves, rubbing the now sore spot on his face and swatting the annoying decoration away, "Amy is an awesome cook! She came up with this red velvet/chili pepper...*thing*...and now I'm hooked."

"Only you," Shadow murmurs in exasperation.

"Shut up! It's good. It's like equal parts sweet and spicy," Sonic goes on to explain as they get up to the line, "You'll see what I mean."

"I'm sure I will," Shadow states, not questioning it.

Sonic and Shadow are the next to order and Amy is so frazzled she doesn't even see them at first. When she does, her face brightens and she looks them over. "Aw, you two look so *cute*! You wouldn't happen to be on a *date*, would you?" Amy asks with big sparkly eyes.

Shadow goes to affirm her assumptions, but Sonic cuts in to stop him, "*No!* We're just... ya know, here to make sure you stay in business."

Amy looks over his shoulder at the line going out the door and she smiles back at him, "I think I'll manage." Her fingers hover over the register as she asks, "Your regular, Sonic?"

"Make it two," Sonic responds curtly, "I want Shadow to try it."

"Sonic," Amy says, trying not to laugh at him, "You can order one with two forks. I'm not going to judge you. You two are married."

Sonic gets all flustered and blushes, "I...! I...!"

Shadow places a twenty on the counter, "That's fine."

"Shadow!" Sonic shouts like he betrayed him.

"Alright," Amy says sweetly as she rings them up, "One Red Velvet/Chili Pepper Surprise coming right up!" She hands the change to Shadow and expertly cuts the piece of cake off onto a little heart shaped plate.

Sonic leans into Shadow and grumbles, "What'd you do that for?"

"It's busy," Shadow responds unflinching, "I don't want to hold up the line."

"Here ya go," Amy says as she places their dish down, two pink forks already pressed into the fluffy dessert in a decorative manner, "You boys enjoy your date!"

Shadow nods to her and takes the plate, handing it to Sonic, "Thank you."

"We're not on a date!" Sonic tries to shout, but is carted away from the line by Shadow.

The booths are circular with heart shaped head rests so that no one has to sit across from each other. They can sit side-by-side while they eat. Amy designed them this way specifically with couples in mind. Looking around, this is a popular spot for people to come on dates.

Sonic sits in the booth five feet apart from Shadow like he's attempting to sit across from him like a normal booth would be, but it just looks awkward. Especially since the table is heart shaped too and the farther you sit, the less and less table space you get.

"Sonic, get over here," Shadow orders, sitting properly in the middle of the booth.

"No," Sonic says childishly as he holds the plate in his hands, huddled in the corner, "She's watching."

Shadow glances up at the pink hedgehog frantically trying to get orders out. He sighs and crosses one leg over the other, "No, she's not."

"She's *always* watching," Sonic whispers darkly like he's traumatized.

"Don't be ridiculous," Shadow retorts, getting agitated.

Sonic just huddles closer to his dessert; cursing it for being so good and the lengths he has to go to get it.

Shadow leans over and barely manages to reach for the phone in Sonic's pocket. He presses a few buttons before holding it up in the air.

"What are you doin'?" Sonic asks, legitimately curious.

"I am taking a selfie," Shadow says with a stoic voice.

Sonic raises an eyebrow at him.

"If you want to be a part of this, you need to come over here," Shadow informs him.

Sonic's face drops when he hears that. He looks between his phone and Amy before slowly scooting back over because how is he supposed to say no to a selfie with Shadow? Shadow *never* takes selfies. Sonic slowly places his hand on the phone with him because he knows for a fact Shadow doesn't know how to work the camera on his phone.

"Ready?" Sonic asks.

"I'm ready," Shadow says back like he would if someone asked him if he was ready for war.

"Alright, say 'cheese,'" Sonic says, widening his smile before hitting the button. He pulls his phone down so he can look at the picture and he blushes a little. He looks back at Shadow in awe, "You smiled!"

Shadow glances down at the picture of himself which has a calm, confident smile on his face and shrugs like it's nothing.

Sonic places a hand on his cheek, trying to stop himself from gushing in public. Being this close to Shadow now has made him feel a little more comfortable. So, he places the plate onto the tabletop carefully.

Shadow side-glances Sonic and smirks at his shy demeanor, finding it quite adorable. He picks up the fork closest to him and cuts off a piece before holding it up to Sonic's mouth.

Sonic feels his face heat up and looks away a bit embarrassed before opening his mouth. His demeanor quickly changing to that of pure bliss as the flavors hit his taste buds. He swallows the moist, fluffy treat before cutting off a piece for Shadow much the same.

Shadow rests his hand to his cheek, waiting patiently for it and when it reaches his mouth he lets his lips slide off of the fork.

Sonic swallows thickly and secretly hopes there's a round two waiting for him back at home with Shadow.

One eye opens to look up at Sonic and with that look alone he can tell his fantasies are going to become a reality. Shadow swallows the treat, testing the flavors on his taste buds. It's very much sweet, but has a little bit of heat to it. He didn't think those two combinations would be any good, but here it was proving him wrong. He actually welcomes the spice that burns against his tongue.

"Your taste in food always astounds me," is all Shadow manages to say.

"So, you *do* like it? Told you," Sonic responds with a confident smile as he scoops another piece into his mouth.

Shadow eyes it hungrily and murmurs, "Perhaps we should get a second to-go so I can get the full experience."

Sonic's eyes widen when he hears that and he chokes. He swallow hard, managing to not die of obstruction of sweets and feels the heat not only in his mouth, but up his face to the tips of his ears. "I... um... uh...! *Um....!*" Sonic tries desperately to form a sentence.

Shadow places his finger to Sonic's chin and beckons him closer before leaning in to a kiss. He feels Sonic fight slightly, but inevitably melt into it. Shadow tongue glides against Sonic's lips, but he pulls away before delving in deeper.

Sonic feels the heat of the dessert tingling against his lips and he's looking at Shadow with utter surprise, "How do you make everything sexy?"

Shadow shrugs and twirls the fork in his hand thoughtfully, "Perhaps it's more about how attractive you are."

Sonic buries his face into his hands and shrinks against the tabletop because he just can't handle Shadow's romance. It's an ever hungry inferno engulfing everything in its path. It's so unfair.

"Sonic," Shadow says a bit pensively before cutting off another corner and eating it.

Sonic slowly lifts his head and watches Shadow, finding it weird how his face had suddenly changed. It looks distant and almost melancholy. "What's up, Shads?" He asks a little concerned.



His fork lingers on his lips for a moment as if trying to form the words in his head before questioning, “Do I...offer enough of my attention to you?”

Sonic looks absolutely confused before bursting out into laughter, “WHAT!?”

Shadow is almost startled by Sonic’s reaction.

“Of course you do,” Sonic finally says after another bout of laughter. He wipes the corner of his eye because he’s in tears by how funny it is and explains, “I *like* how distant you are. It gives me a challenge. It makes it that much more rewarding when I *do* get it.”

“I... don’t really understand,” Shadow says like he feels awkward to be sitting there now.

“Okay, uh...” Sonic takes a minute to figure out how to explain it, “Oh! Ya know how we can’t have chili dogs everyday otherwise we’ll get sick of it after awhile.”

“According to Miles you ate chili dogs for two years straight when you were younger,” Shadow responds a bit blandly.

Sonic rolls his eyes and tries to reiterate, “Yeah, and I wanted it from you every day for the first two years of our relationship. See where I’m going with this?”

Shadow feels the light bulb go off in his head and he finally nods as if understanding, “I see.”

“We’re *fine*, dude,” Sonic assures him and places his hand on his, “Trust me. You worry too much.”

“Alright,” Shadow nods, the anxiety settling down in his stomach. It’s quiet between them for a long moment and Shadow watches Sonic scoop another piece of cake into his mouth before asking, “So, does that mean you’ve come here every day since trying this?”

Sonic’s face turns into dread and he slides down the seat almost to the ground, “I have a *problem*, okay Shadow?!”

“Alright,” Shadow nods as if it doesn’t seem to bother him, “I’m just asking.”

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The sand from the beach kicks up behind him as he zooms forward. He can feel the ocean air hitting his face and it’s both exhilarating and refreshing. Although when he leans forward, his legs start to shake again and he grits his teeth. “Come on!” He shouts angrily, but gravity doesn’t care what he has to say and he wipes out. His board flies through the air and he skids to his knees. He gives his board a betrayed look before hanging his head in defeat.

“At least you didn’t land on your face this time,” Blaze says calmly as she makes her way over to the fallen hedgehog.

“Oh, you were watching?” Silver asks like he’s even more ashamed by that fact.

“You should be asleep,” Blaze points out with her hands on her hips.

“I know...” Silver responds as he picks himself back up and dusts the sand off his knees, “I just want to get this right.”

“You can’t wait until the morning?” She asks.

“I *need* to learn how to ride this thing,” Silver says with determination before running back over to

his board.

Blaze sighs and goes to follow after him anyway. She finally does so when Silver is pulling the board out of the sand and dusting it off. "It's also wise to rest so you are re-energized for the morning. Otherwise you'll sleep the day away," she informs him.

"How did you know I was out here anyway?" Silver questions, eyes not leaving his board.

Blaze places her hand on the gem on her forehead before letting it fall, "Surely you knew I was coming."

Silver frowns and looks away like he knows she's right. He carries his board under his arm and makes his way over to the small dock. He sits down with his legs hanging over the edge and he looks up at the sky.

She trails behind him slowly and stands by his side. She looks up at the sky with him and questions, "Something on your mind, Silver?"

"This is going to sound weird, but..." Silver says carefully as he balances his board on his lap, "I feel like we're connected. Like... I knew you in a past life."

Blaze lets a smile grace her face as she folds her arms across her chest, "I guess you could say we've met in a different time."

"Do you think the sky ever changes?" Silver questions out loud, "Will it look the same in two years? Ten years? Maybe even one-hundred years from now."

Blaze looks back down at Silver and how the moon's light radiates off of him, "I believe so. I believe the sky will even look the same two-hundred years from now."

"That's good to know," Silver says in a peaceful tone.

Blaze nods back and can't help but see a little bit of Sonic in him. Her Sonic. The king of the future. Silver's quills are so blindingly white that they almost look blue.

"Are you happy now, Blaze?"

Blaze's eyes widen because she swears she hears Sonic's calm, sad voice. Her arms slowly unfold and rests at her sides as she asks, "Excuse me?"

The small hedgehog turns to her and she can see Sonic's face staring back at her with a sad smile, "Did you finally find happiness?"

Blaze feels her voice getting caught in her throat before she nods, still in awe by what's she's seeing.

"That's good to hear," he says, his smile finally reaching his eyes, "I'm glad."

Blaze reaches her hand forward and opens her mouth, unsure what to even say before she sees Silver getting back up to his feet. She reels her hand back when she sees Silver's face smiling back at her.

"I think you're right. I need to get some sleep," Silver tells her and marches back toward the sand.

Blaze gives him a bewildered look before turning to look back up at the sky. She smiles up at it before whispering, "We're always under the same sky." She turns to follow after Silver to make sure he gets back alright.



## Possessive



### Chapter Nine: Possessive

Sonic lets out a small sigh as he dreams about running through a large floral field. He lands on a comfy bed of flowers and nuzzles into it. It's soft and the sun overhead is warm and comforting. The clouds roll by lazily and it's quiet and peaceful. He doesn't have a care in the world.

Although the sun gets a little too warm in the sky, but he doesn't mind it. He says that, but after awhile it's really warm and he can feel the sweat gathering at his forehead. His body feels tight and uncomfortable. He moves his hips down and feels something warm and wet against his skin. It tingles at his whole body and he slowly opens his eyes.

He hears a low rumble of a moan under him and the noise is hot and wet. Sonic goes to move his hands, but they catch. He dazedly looks up and notices a pair of handcuffs around his wrists as he bound to the bedpost. He blinks the focus back into his eyes as he tries to wake himself up, "Wha...?"

"Mm..." Shadow murmurs against his skin and nips the spot right above his groin, "So, you're finally awake."

"Shadow?" Sonic asks a bit dazed before looking down. Shadow is under him between his legs, licking and nipping at his abdomen and his eyes glance back up at the handcuffs around his wrists, "What's goin' on?"

"You had said you wished I'd wake you up more," Shadow murmurs back, his focus still on Sonic's body.

“Okay...” Sonic nods like he gets that part. He pulls at his wrists and the metal clanks as it tightens, “What’s with the cuffs though?”

“I’m giving you a small glimpse into my own fantasies,” Shadow whispers before pulling Sonic’s hips up more and letting his tongue slowly glide up Sonic’s torso, making sure to leave a hot, wet trail in his wake, “Is that not what you wished for?”

Sonic shivers, feeling how the warmth quickly cools against his skin, “Y-yeah, kind of.”

Shadow halts his movements and says, “I can stop.”

Sonic shakes his head frantically, “N-no, don’t do that! I kinda like this.”

A dark chuckle bubbles up from Shadow’s throat and his hands trail up Sonic’s body, squeezing possessively, “You’re *mine*.”

Sonic snickers a little, liking how into this Shadow’s getting. His eyes squint down around Shadow’s neck. There’s a small chain around it and a key, presumably to the cuffs nestled into the white fur on his chest.

Shadow smirks when he sees Sonic take note of it, “Do you think you can free yourself?”

Sonic leans forward with a challenge to his voice, “There’s nothing on earth that can bind me for too long!”

“We shall see about that,” Shadow murmurs back, his hands trailing up and down Sonic’s thighs.

Sonic scoots closer and presses his hips down against Shadow’s, watching as the dark hedgehog stifle a moan, “All I have to do is distract you long enough to get it.” Sonic ducks his head down and goes to grab the key with his teeth. He smirks in victory before he feels Shadow’s fingers pinching his cheeks together roughly.

“It won’t be that easy,” Shadow informs him before leaning in and swiping his tongue in between Sonic’s teeth. Sonic’s tongue lashes out to fight him for it and their lost in a war with their mouths, fighting over the cool metal clanking against their teeth.

Sonic feels like he has the high ground until Shadow’s hand drags up the back of his leg and he feels two fingers being pressed against his entrance. Sonic lets out a shaky breath and it’s enough for Shadow to lash his tongue out and pull the key back into his possession. He lets it drop out of his mouth and it falls, resting on his chest once more. “Still quite sensitive from yesterday I see,” Shadow points out triumphantly, his chest rising and falling.

Sonic’s first instinct is to move his hands down to stop Shadow, but the cuffs bite at his wrists instead and all he can do is squirm around as Shadow teases his entrance. His fingers aren’t yet in, but the small touches are enough of a warning for what’s to come.

“Don’t worry,” Shadow assures him softly, “I won’t be too rough. Just enough to keep your mind preoccupied so you don’t escape.” He slips one finger in and it earns him a straggled cry, “That is... if you still feel like escaping after I’m done with you.”

Sonic’s fingers curl around the links of the cuffs, holding onto them desperately. Sonic lets out a silent bitter laugh. This was payback from what he tried to do yesterday. He can tell. He hates to admit that he kind of likes it, but he almost enjoys the challenge of proving that he can break free too.

“So, question,” Sonic says in a mocking tone, trying to hide his desperation, “Where did you even

get these from? Work? If so, why are they even here?"

"I told you, Sonic," Shadow murmurs ominously as he slips a second finger inside, "My mind is a dark place you shouldn't roam."

Sonic lets out a sharp breath at that and tries to keep himself propped up on his knees. He breathes heavily, feeling the stretch of the two digits inside him. Okay, maybe mocking Shadow wasn't going to work. Shadow's response to his comment was only serving to fuel his imagination for what Shadow has in store for him.

Shadow hums out, savoring the sensation of the dampness forming on his abdomen from Sonic's weeping member. His arm hooks around Sonic's waist, leveraging him up so Shadow can glide his tongue up to taste Sonic's salty flavor. He breathes in the scent before letting his tongue slide against the slit where more of that delicious delicacy is forming. Shadow asks in a mesmeric manner, "Have you given up, love?" The moment he says it, his fingers curl slowly inside of Sonic.

Sonic tries to yank his hands away, but they lock together against the bedpost and he lets out an unrestrained moan. No, he wasn't giving up. He could do this. He could hold it together. He glances down at the key shimmering against the white hairs of Shadow's chest and he swallows thickly.

Sonic smirks and lets out a breathless laugh, "Are you just gunna foreplay me into submission? I thought you were a little more creative than that, Shadow. You're all talk. I bet your thoughts are pretty vanilla when it comes to the bedroom."

Shadow looks up at Sonic through his eyebrows, snarling at the insult. His fingers splay out, stretching Sonic out with purpose this time. "I was going to go easy on you," Shadow states with heat to his voice, "I wouldn't suggest biting off more than you can chew. With your hands bound, you don't exactly have the edge here."

"There ya go again, Shadow," Sonic responds eyes shining down at him like he'd already won, "Always underestimating me." Sonic leans down so he's in Shadow's face, grinning like a madman, "Show me what you've got."

Shadow glares up at him and presses his palm over Sonic's mouth. Not wanting to hear his words nor look at his dumb grin either. "That mouth of yours is going to get you into serious trouble one day," Shadow warns him, "I'll put it to some good use."

Sonic moans purposefully against Shadow's hand and his grin reaches his eyes when he sees Shadow's face hardening with anger.

Shadow twists Sonic onto his back and Sonic hisses as the cuffs cross over one another and tighten at his wrists. His feet slide against the sheets trying to get some kind of bearings. He winces, feeling most of his weight hanging up by his wrists.

Shadow shakes his head, looking down at Sonic in disappointment, "Give up?"

Sonic struggles more, but shakes his head. "No way," Sonic replies through strained vocal chords.

A smile appears on Shadow's face like he's pleased by the answer, "Good." The dark hedgehog kneels over Sonic's thrashing form and he presses his thumb against Sonic's lip. It's rough and kind of scrubs there as if he's trying to erase his smirk from existence.

Sonic reels his legs up, trying to hook them around Shadow's waist to help prop himself up to relieve the strain on his wrists.

Shadow shakes his head at him, “No, I need that for what we’re about to do. Although...” Shadow lifts his hand up and grasps Sonic’s arm to hold him up so there isn’t as much pressure on his wrists, “I can alleviate some of your discomfort.”

Sonic nods graciously and uses this calm to catch his breath.

“We can stop at any time,” Shadow reminds him softly.

Sonic shakes his head, “Give it to me.”

“Very well,” Shadow nods in agreement as his hand grips Sonic’s head up and positions himself in front of Sonic’s face, “Now, allow me to wipe that smile off of your face.”

Sonic’s grin widens just to spite Shadow before he feels the head being pressed up against his lips. He opens his mouth willingly and wraps his lips around Shadow’s member, feeling the pulse against his tongue.

Shadow raises an eyebrow at him before shaking his head, “Are you so willing to be punished?”

Sonic just replies with a moan and takes Shadow in deeper into his throat.

Shadow’s eyes threaten to close from the sensation, but he keeps them open so he can watch the show. He rubs his thumb soothingly against Sonic’s scalp and observes how Sonic’s lips slide around his girth as he presses himself in and out of Sonic’s mouth. It’s slow like he’s savoring the sight of it. It’s only when Sonic’s eyes open to look up at him he’s completely enraptured. Shadow licks his lips and lets his hand slide down to cup Sonic’s slack cheek. “Good boy,” he praises with a smirk, “You like that, don’t you?”

Sonic’s eyes slip shut again and he moans eagerly around him.

Shadow bites his lip and feels the vibration against him as it shudders at his soul. Shadow lets out a pleasant noise and lets his eyes slip shut so he can fully immerse himself into the feeling. With Sonic at his command, he felt powerful and in control. It was heaven and pure bliss wrapped as one.

Shadow’s brow furrows when he feels something tickle at his chest and he slides one eye open a fraction of the way. He looks down and sees that Sonic’s eyes are open wide with the key in his hand, nearly about to unlock the cuffs.

Shadow glares down at him when he sees this. Sonic had distracted him and had almost gotten free. Shadow shoves his hips forward and snaps the chain back as the key slips out of Sonic’s fingers. He watches as Sonic turns away from his member and choke out from the blow. “I have to admit that was very *resourceful* of you,” Shadow comments angrily, but still impressed.

Sonic coughs a few more times, getting his gag reflex under control before smirking up at Shadow, “Resourceful? Nah, you’re just one-note. Give me a challenge, Shadow.”

“If that were truly the case,” Shadow retorts as he twists Sonic back onto his front, “you would be free by now.”

Sonic breathes a sigh of relief when the pressure dissipates from his wrists and he’s kneeling against the mattress again. Although his legs are shaking slightly. He grips the links of the cuffs once more so he can pull himself up onto better footing. “I’m just getting started,” Sonic says breathlessly.

“As am I,” Shadow snarls as he positions himself behind Sonic. His hand slides up Sonic’s front to his chin, guiding in back so he can see his face from over his shoulder, “There’s still time to

surrender.”

Sonic can feel the key hanging from Shadow’s neck, dancing tantalizingly close to his shoulder. It reflects the morning light into his peripheral vision each time it twirls back and forth. It’s so close he could reach it, but he physically can’t. So, he just laughs and shakes his head, “Give me your worst.”

Shadow chuckles in response and leans in to kiss him on the cheek tenderly. “As you wish,” Shadow’s words ghost across Sonic’s face before it disappears behind him.

Sonic lets out a deep breath as he mentally and physically prepares himself. He slides his legs apart and tightens his grip onto the cuff links.

“Again, presenting yourself to me,” Shadow mocks, his form looming over Sonic, “I’m intrigued by your next attempt.”

“What can I say. I aim to please,” Sonic says back, his voice shaking a little with anticipation. He wishes Shadow would just do it already.

“I can testify to that,” Shadow responds darkly.

Sonic’s eyes widen and he chokes out a breath suddenly. Shadow had pushed in fully and deeply and if he wouldn’t have taken that time to open him up earlier that might have actually hurt. It more so surprised Sonic because he wasn’t expecting it. Sonic takes a minute to breathe and he can tell Shadow isn’t going to start moving without his say. He’s just like that. Sonic has to laugh to himself because things like that almost ruin flow of this. “I’m already on my knees. Are you gunna make me beg now?” Sonic asks cockily.

“You’re allowed to beg,” Shadow states, snapping his hips forward again reveling in the surprised gasp that comes out of Sonic’s mouth, “Beg, plead, scream my name over and over... All fair game.”

Sonic shouts out in a teasing manner, “Oh, Shadow~! Give me your ultimate dick~!”

Shadow growls, not liking to be toyed with. Especially now when he has the upper hand. Shadow leans forward and holds Sonic’s hips in a tight grip as he thrusts into him over and over again. One hand squeezes Sonic’s jaw so he can guide it around enough for him to kiss his filthy mouth. He tastes of him and he doesn’t much care. It’s just another mark of himself on the blue hedgehog.

Sonic meets his hips with Shadow’s, taking him in willingly. He moans into Shadow’s mouth, feeling the strain on his neck from Shadow’s rough hold. Their mouths come apart wetly and Sonic sees the smolder in Shadow’s eyes. He’s getting into it again. Sonic licks his damp lips and lets out a hungry noise.

Shadow grits his teeth and reaches closer to kiss and suck and nip at those beautiful lips more. Sonic’s body, his lips, his *heat* it drives him mad with ravenous want for more. He can feel Sonic’s face inching away from him and he follows it, desperate for more.

What he doesn’t expect though is Sonic to twist his body around, lifting his leg in the air, so Shadow can take him in even deeper.

Shadow immediately supports Sonic’s leg upward and pushes in closer. He feels his eyes rolling in the back of his skull by how good he feels. How tight and hot his body is. He moans as he feels those walls fluttering all around him. He leans down to kiss Sonic fully on the mouth.

Sonic kisses back with the same vigor. Hot and wet in his mouth, panting loudly and rudely.



Shadow can hear the metal of the twisted cuffs clanking against the bedpost and a smirk grows on his face. Sonic is *his*. All his.

Sonic pulls away and trails kisses down Shadow's neck softly.

Shadow moves his head so Sonic can get to it better in the haze of his arousal.

Sonic snickers evilly against Shadow's neck before his teeth lash out.

Shadow's eyes open wide when he hears that, but it's too late.

Sonic has the chain of his necklace in his teeth and yanking hard enough to break. Sonic angles his foot up and lets the key land on it and kicks it up. He skillfully catches the key in his hand and quickly undoes one of the cuffs. His body falls onto the mattress and he braces his foot onto Shadow's torso, kicking him backwards.

"You..." Shadow curses as he tries to get his bearings.

Sonic's thighs are pinning him against the sheets though as Sonic cockily unlocks the other cuff, tossing the pair onto the ground with a thunk. "I told you. No force on earth is gunna keep me bound," Sonic states confidently.

Shadow sighs in defeat, "Was worth a shot."

"Aw... Don't be like that," Sonic says a bit softer. He leans down and whispers against his lips, "If ya want, I can pretend I'm trapped. It's really sexy when you start getting into it."

Shadow just shakes his head and places his hands on Sonic's hip. They're soft and caring and they guide Sonic back into place. They both breathe when they come together again. Shadow just admires Sonic's body as he moves and how his eyes close blissfully. He smiles because this is kind of how he likes it too.

Slow and sensual.

-

Silver comes home around noon and he ends up using the rest of his Sunday to play video games with his dad in the living room while his father watches. Well, Shadow's more or less checking some emails, but he does tend to glance up at what's happening every once in awhile. He's just mass checking everything to make sure the world hasn't exploded or something while on his weekend. He doesn't like being away from things longer than he needs to just in case.

Meanwhile, Sonic is steering his body left and right as he's playing a racing game with Silver.

"You do realize that physically moving your body doesn't make the character on screen move any better, right?" Silver grumbles out, pushing him back because he's getting irritated.

"Nuh uh," Sonic retorts as he leans in toward Silver again as he makes a turn, "It *totally* helps!"

"No, it doesn't," Silver shouts back, pushing his entire body up against Sonic's shoulder in an attempt to stop him.

"Behave, you two," Shadow remarks, still preoccupied with what he's doing.

Silver's lips twist into a scowl and glares up at Sonic like it's his fault. Which is fair because it kind of is. Shadow wasn't even paying attention to what was happening and Silver felt put off that he was

getting scolded at for something that wasn't even his fault.

Silver remains silent, doing his best to ignore Sonic's frantic movements. That is, until he's almost at the finish line about to take first place when Sonic leans all the way into him, knocking his controller out of his hands. He watches in horror as his character flies off the track and Sonic's takes 1<sup>st</sup> place.

*His 1<sup>st</sup> place.*

Silver gets up and kicks the controller, glaring down at Sonic, "You did that on purpose!"

"Did what on purpose?" Sonic asks innocently.

"You act like a child," Silver says with his hands on his hips, "Why can't I have a normal dad!?"

"Silver," Shadow's eyes are staring down at him with warning.

"But he *always* does this!" Silver shouts back, trying to defend himself. His eyes widen when he sees Shadow placing his laptop down to the side and he nearly falls backwards when Shadow stands up from the couch.

Sonic swoops Silver into his arms and gives him a noogie, "Easy, Shads! I'm just teasing. I was making him mad on purpose." He nuzzles his face into Silver's forehead and coos out, "I can't help it. I love seeing Silvy so grumpy."

Shadow's eyes remain locked with Silver before he steps away from them both to go into the kitchen, "He needs to learn to control his temper."

Silver tries to fend off Sonic all while his eyes follow Shadow. He frowns at his father's comment, feeling the heat rise in his chest. It was all inevitable anyway. He probably shouldn't even bother trying to appease him. He's counting down the days until Mrs. Labyrinth tells Shadow how much of a slacker he is.

Silver wiggles out of Sonic's grip and makes his walk of shame up the stairs.

"Silver, where're you going?" Sonic asks as he motions to the TV screen, "We still have like three more races in the Grand Prix."

Silver stops when he gets to the top step and mumbles quietly, "I don't really feel like playing anymore..."

Sonic feels his heart sink in his chest a little when he sees that, "Silver, wait! I was just joking." He watches Silver disappear down the hall and he sighs when he hears the bedroom door shut.

"He'll grow out of this," Shadow assures him from the kitchen.

Sonic makes his way over to the gaming system and turns it off along with the TV. "I dunno? I might have pushed him too far," Sonic remarks as he rubs the back of his neck. He has the urge to go up and talk to him, but at the same time he feels like he caused it.

"Try not to dwell on it," Shadow responds dismissively.

"Yeah... okay," Sonic nods back, but doesn't exactly feel better about it.

# Dreary



## Chapter Ten: Dreary

Silver wakes up before his alarm the next morning. He stuffs his board into his backpack and zips it up partially. It's still hanging out the top a little, but it does its job. When he makes his way down the hall, he can hear the light scribbling of his dad's pen.

When he gets into the kitchen he can indeed see his dad drawing away. Except his cheek is being held up by his fist and he has dark circles under his eyes. "Dad?" Silver asks.

Sonic's eyes shoot up when he see him and he looks at the clock. He gets up and rummages through the cabinets, "How about some cereal?"

Silver drops his bag at the foot of his chair and climbs on it, "kay."

He's waiting for Sonic to make some kind of joke or pun, but he just sets a bowl down and fills it with cereal and milk for him. Sonic goes to sit back down shortly after.

It's quiet between them and the only noises are the soft pops of Silver's cereal and the continued scratches of Sonic's pen.

Silver picks up his spoon and begins eating. He only looks up at his dad once or twice, but Sonic seems like he looks disheartened and stressed about something. Silver looks down and swings his legs nervously. He doesn't even know what to say. He feels like he should because this feels weird, but he just remains silent.

The car ride is just as quiet and they barely look at each other. Sonic seems fidgety though and there's no music on the radio he likes so he keeps flipping through the channels.

When they do get to the school, Sonic doesn't pull up in front of the hydrant. He chooses a normal spot and forces a smile for Silver, "Have a good day."

Silver frowns and feels like there should be more. There was no added Silvy or kiddo or buddy. Just 'Have a good day.' Silver just nods slowly before opening the door and getting out. When he gets to the sidewalk, he turns to watch the car leave. It doesn't peel out like it usually does. Just leaves.

Silver tries not to think into it too much.

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It's dreary as ever today and the rain won't stop. It's a good camouflage, but at the same time seeing anything was out of the question. The rain doesn't seem like it's going to let up anytime soon either.

"Agent Shadow, come in," Topaz's voice comes to life on Shadow's communication device, "Status report on your mission. What kind of progress has your team made?"

"No progress. Just a waste of time," Shadow grumbles back.

Zero glances up at him for a moment when he hears that and turns away.

"That's a shame," Topaz states, "I suppose you should fall back for now. Maybe regroup and we'll figure out another plan."

Shadow goes to respond when he hears Zero's voice, "Wait. Permission to speak."

Shadow just rolls his eyes and turns his attention to Zero. He's put Zero on a no talking rule, but him asking every time was getting on his last nerve. He doesn't say anything just motions for him to continue.

"We are not having any luck tracking anyone down because they can sense us," Zero informs.

Shadow doesn't understand what he means by that. It's doubtful. They haven't made a move in hours. There's no way anyone knows they're out here.

"We should send the robot out and track its progress," Zero explains as he motions to Omega.

"Omega is part of this team," Shadow speaks sharply, "and *he* isn't exactly made for those types of missions."

"Oh, we would not use him for espionage," Zero explains like it's a joke, "No, I was thinking more along the lines of bait. Shake the hornet's nest if you will."

"We aren't *using* Omega," Shadow states sternly, "Period." He turns away and directs his attention to Omega, "Inform GUN that we're on our way. We'll fall back for now."

"Fall back?" Zero asks like he can't believe he's serious, "I am offering a solution and you want to fall back?"

"Agent Zero," Shadow announces with firm professionalism, "Not another word from you until we get back to base."

"Listen," Zero notes the sharp glare being aimed at him, but continues like a conman anyway, "I

*know* these mercenaries. I was one of them. No matter what follow up plan you come up with, they are going to see it coming from a mile away. Now, do you want to get this done and stop them before they cause any more damage or do you want to delay another inevitable failure?"

Shadow tsks and turns away from him. He hates how much sense Zero is making. He's silent for a long moment before speaking into his communication device with an irritated sigh, "Change of plans, commander. We're going to continue our pursuit by taking a different approach. I'll report back in 45 minutes."

"Understood," Topaz replies, "Good luck, Shadow."

"Thank you," Zero says with a pleased tone, "I promise this will work."

Shadow's glare hardens as a result of Zero's attitude and walks past him not even bothering to make eye contact, "Promises mean nothing to me out here. I just want results. You have 45 minutes, Zero."

"Then there is no time to waste," Zero responds as he makes his way out of the brush. He instructs Omega on where he should be headed and allows Shadow to track him while he's gone. The two hang back and Shadow is being keenly aware of the time. "Relax," Zero assures him with a smirk, "It is all going according to plan."

Shadow eyes Zero and almost wants to ask him if he's aware he that sounds like a stereotypical villain initiating his evil plan. Omega's voice comes to life though and knocks those thoughts away, "My sensors are picking up multiple heat signatures. Permission to lock and load?"

Shadow seems exasperated, "No, Omega... We need to—"

Zero shrugs and asks, "Why not? Give them a show while we make our grand entrance."

"We stick to the plan," Shadow shoots back, finding Zero's insubordinate behavior quite agitating.

"Hmmm..." Zero hums out as if he's pretending to mull over it and returns his gaze to Shadow, "And whose plan was this exactly?"

Shadow grits his teeth, but his attention falls to Omega's voice when it comes in again, "There are more heat signatures. They are surrounding the area. I will eliminate any and all foes that try to oppose I, E-123 Omega, the Ultimate E-series robot."

Zero taps the back of his knuckle against Shadow's shoulder playfully and begins to walk forward, "That *is* our cue, Shadow."

This is so clearly a trap. Zero was leading them into enemy territory so the mercenaries can ambush him and Omega. With how much Zero loves to hear himself talk, he can just imagine the lengthy monologue this idiot is going to give him. It didn't matter. Shadow was one step ahead of him anyway. He's anticipating Zero's betrayal so he can put an end to all of this once and for all and put these jackals behind bars.

-

Silver sighs sadly as he looks out the window. He watches as the rain patters against the glass and slides down. At this rate, they wouldn't be able to go outside for recess. If they don't go outside...

Silver glances at the corner of the room where his classmate's jackets and coats are hung up. Silver's is there too with the new board he made this past weekend.

His eyes glance back at Jet. He looks like he's bored out of his mind as his book is open on his desk. He's flipping the page before stretching and yawning. Jet looks up like he'd rather look at anything other than his book, but jolts when he sees Silver looking at him. Jet immediately grabs his book and hides his eyes with it.

Silver snickers a little at that.

"Something amusing about your math booklet, Silver?" The teacher asks.

It's Silver's turn to jolt this time and bury his face into his book, "N-no, ma'am!"

"Didn't think so," she replies with irritation, but she lets it slide.

Silver slowly lowers his book and sneakily glances back at Jet again before smiling, focusing back on the content on the pages.

The rain doesn't stop like Silver had hoped it would and they're forced to spend their recess in class. Luckily, Mrs. Labyrinth isn't too much of a demon to make them do homework through it. Silver sees his chance and takes it.

Jet is sitting in his desk minding his own business while he pages through a new issue of his comic when he sees a box being shoved on top of it. Jet's eyes slowly look up and see the white hedgehog with the box of checkers. Jet stubbornly pulls his comic out from underneath the box and turns sideways in his desk as he continues to read.

Silver turns the empty desk in front of Jet's around and sits facing him as he puts the game together.

"I'm not talking to you," Jet responds, trying to move farther away.

"Funny first thing to tell me then," Silver shoots back as he places the red pieces on Jet's side of the board.

Jet lets out an irritated noise, but doesn't say anything back out of spite.

"I made my own board," Silver tells him as he moves the first piece, "I want to race you again."

Jet sighs in defeat and moves the next piece, but tries to make it seem like he's more engrossed into what he's reading.

Silver frowns when he sees that Jet isn't responding. So, he moves his next piece and continues, "I wasn't prepared last time, but I've been practicing and getting better."

Jet slides another piece forward and scoffs proudly, "There's no way you could make a board that could compete with me. So, don't even bother."

Silver glares at Jet and takes his turn, "I'm not accepting your pity win, Jet."

Jet smirks at him, finally folding his comic book closed and giving Silver his full attention, "That's the only win you're gonna get."

Silver pouts at Jet's response and moves a piece over one of the red ones, taking it off the board as if it's proof enough. When Jet doesn't look impressed, he tries to take a deep breath in not wanting to get angry. He wonders what his dad would say in a situation like this. Just as Jet goes to move another checker, Silver states, "Wow, Jet. I thought you were a hawk not a chicken."

Jet's eyes widen when he hears Silver's comment as if he would have never thought he'd hear those

words coming out of his mouth.

Silver motions at the game in front of them, "Your turn, Jet." He kind of likes the surprised look on Jet's face.

Jet glares at him and takes his turn, "I don't recommend dishing out anything you can't take, Silver the Hedgehog."

Silver finds himself blushing at the comment and he grits out, "What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean," Jet responds as he sits back with his arms folded across his chest.

"There's a difference between teasing and bullying," Silver says with a sharp tone as he takes his turn.

Jet raises an eyebrow as he sees the setup of the board. He takes out almost every black piece before landing on the empty space on the end. "Yeah," Jet agrees before watching Silver king him, "and it's no fun challenging someone who doesn't know how to take a loss."

Silver feels the anger growing in his chest, "One minute you're bullying me and the next you're giving me the cold shoulder? You don't make any sense!"

"I don't want to be associated with killjoys," Jet proclaims like he's too good to even talk to Silver.

Silver is seeing red. He flips the board over and the checkers go flying across the room. The pieces clatter against the ground and the room goes silent. Silver gets into Jet's face like he wants to punch him, but he's doing everything in his power to stop himself.

"Silver the Hedgehog," Mrs. Labyrinth states authoritatively as she gets out of her seat.

Jet just gives Silver a smug look and says, "I think I've made my point."

Silver goes to open his mouth, but the teacher is calling out to him again, "Clean up this mess immediately, Silver!"

Silver glares once more at the green hawk before turning to pick up the pieces off the ground one-by-one. Tears prick at his eyes. He hates Jet. He hates him so much.

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Shadow can see the explosions going off in the distance and he no longer needs the tracker. They're getting close and he can tell Zero is giddy with excitement. For what, Shadow doesn't know because this thing was going to be over before it's begun.

The two drop down next to Omega and they stand in a circle, back-to-back.

"Where are they, Omega?" Shadow asks, but doesn't really need an answer because he can suddenly see all of the yellow glowing eyes in the shadows. He feels Omega firing behind him and Shadow leaps up into one of the trees. He pulls one of the jackals out of hiding and drop kicks it to the ground. Another one comes flying out at him and he grabs their head before delivering them a electrical shock through their system.

Shadow turns to Zero as if he's his next opponent, but he looks a bit astonished when he sees Zero fighting them off with his sword. Shadow doesn't dwell on it much before he's sending another blow to a jackal that is stupid enough to go after him.

The team makes quick work of them. They're subdued within minutes and the ones that aren't out cold are bound up ready to be escorted to a jail cell in Central City. Shadow informs Topaz of their success and she radios backup for them so they can collect that assets.

"A bit longer than 45 minutes," Shadow points out with a huff.

"Sorry to disappoint," Zero says back a bit smugly, but still quite respectful to him.

One of the bound jackals just laughs at him, "You are a pathetic one, *Zero*." They say his name in a very derogatory manner, "You can play pretend all you want, but you are still nothing."

Zero's smile drops, but doesn't respond to it.

Shadow steps forward in front of the detained jackal and states, "The only pathetic ones I see here are you and your squad for even thinking you could attack GUN property. So I suggest you shut your mouth."

The jackal just shakes their head and ignores Shadow, "You would give up your life, your *family*, for some false prophet. You are truly disgraceful, Zero."

Zero clenches his teeth and goes to move forward, but Shadow pushes him away from the detained jackal. Zero just shakes his head and turns away. Although the words fester in his heart.

The jackal sees their opportunity though. They get to their feet and lunge forward, cutting their bounds on the blade of Zero's sword before unsheathing their own.

Zero turns back around when he hears it, but he watches in shock as he sees the blade inching closer and closer to his chest.

Shadow doesn't get another second to react.

Zero breathes in heavily as he falls to the ground. He's shaking in fear, not wanting to look up. When he hears the sickly laugh of the jackal, he gaze slowly rises.

Zero's blade is thrust deep into the jackal's chest by Shadow's hands. Shadow is glaring deep into the jackals eyes with anger and terror. He had almost lost another rookie.

"Your fear..." The jackal wheezes out a laugh, "...is strong on my pallet."

Shadow doesn't say anything just steels his face.

In they're dying breath all they say is, "Zero... Your reliance on others... is pitiful. You are *weak*."

Shadow braces his foot on the jackal's body and pushes him off the blade. He closes his eyes and raises his head to the sky as the rain hits his face, hoping to cool his quelling emotions. His fingers twitch around the hilt before slashing the air to clean the blood from it before handing it back to Zero, pommel first.

Zero doesn't say anything. His heart is hammering in his ears and his wet locks are stuck against his face. He doesn't know how to react other than to raise a shaky hand to his sword and take it. Once he does, the weight from it causes it to fall in his limp hand. He feels the tears biting at his eyes, but they fall with the rain on his face unnoticed.

Shadow murmurs sternly, "You're already stronger than them because you get to live another day." He leaves Zero to his own thoughts as he walks back over to Omega and orders him to make sure



their captives are retrained properly.

Shadow glances back at Zero from over his shoulder and watches as he looks down at his reflection in the blade of his sword. He might have gotten the wrong idea of Zero. Maybe he truly is trying to redeem himself. It's clear his allegiance isn't to these mercenaries and he's proven that to him today.

Zero is strangely quiet the rest of that day and on the chopper ride back to base. Shadow feels obligated to stop him before they leave.

"Let me give you a ride home," Shadow states as sternly as he would an order.

Zero just laughs bitterly, "Pity is the worst offense you can give a man."

Shadow watches Zero turn to walk down the street and Shadow grabs him roughly by the shoulder, "It isn't pity. I need to make sure my team is ready and focused for the next day. You watched your own get killed today. I'm just making sure you get home safe because something like that can effect a soldier's mentality. Especially a rookie."

Zero glances up at Shadow's eyes for a moment as if to check to see if he's being truthful. He looks down again and pulls away from Shadow's hand. "Fine," Zero says like it's more of a burden than anything, "Do what you want."

Shadow just nods to him and begins walking. He glances back to make sure Zero is following and when he sees he is, he takes more confident strides.

Instead of standing like he had last time, Zero sits with his back facing Shadow's as they drive. He watches as the sun goes down and the streetlights flicker on, but as they get deeper and deeper into Westopolis the streetlights become less frequent. The buildings look worse for wear and most of the windows are boarded up.

Zero feels the bike slow and he hops off before Shadow can stop, "This is me." He begins to walk off toward one of the dingy buildings where a streetlamp is flicking off and on.

Shadow's eyes scale the building before pulling the bike around and parking on the side.

"I would not do that if I were you," Zero warns with a smirk to his voice.

"Don't worry," Shadow assures him as he gets off, "I used to live around here. No one will touch it."

Zero chuckles like he's impressed, but continues his trek inside, "To have that kind of immunity. I am envious."

"Comes with consequences," is all Shadow replies with as he walks into the building after him. He looks around at the dimly lit lobby. Zero opens the creaky door and they make their way up the stairs. The panels on the stairs whine under their feet and the carpet has tears in it that look like they aren't going to get fixed anytime soon. The plaster on the ceilings are water damaged and crumbling apart. There's bits of plaster all over the floors too. Shadow eyes it in concern before continuing to follow him up.

"Ah, home sweet home," Zero states sarcastically before placing his hand on the doorknob to his room.

Shadow goes to open his mouth, but a door suddenly opens on the end of the hall.

"That you, Zero?!" A loud, angry man shouts as he stomps out into the hallway, "I'll give you a wild

guess at how much money you've paid me last month!" The angry man stops when he sees Shadow and begins retreat back into his room, "I'll... just come back later."

"You do that," Shadow states sternly to the man and watches the door close tight. He turns to Zero who is smiling at him like he's proven his point.

"Pardon me for saying this, but I only see benefits with that kind of power," Zero muses as he opens the door and slips inside.

Shadow isn't going to argue with him. He doesn't feel the need. Others were entitled to their own opinions.

"Take care of yourself, Zero," Shadow only tells him.

"Yeah, yeah..." Zero waves him off like he'd told him to do something tedious and he shuts the door.

Shadow eyes the door in concern. He turns to leave, but stops and eyes the door once more. He just shakes his head and makes his way back down toward the stairs. A door creaks open, but not the one he'd would have hoped for. The landlord is peeking out and Shadow glares at him like he dares him to hassle Zero again. He waits until the man shuts the door before making his way back down the stairs.

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Silver's feet slosh on the soggy ground as he walks outside. He doesn't feel like talking to anyone today. Everything that's happened really spoiled his mood. He just hopes his dad is in better spirits by now because he could really use a hug.

He looks up and notices Sonic's car isn't in the spot near the fire hydrant. He looks around and sees the red sports car parked further down. The teachers are huddled around the driver's side, but the window is rolled up. Silver sighs and makes his way to the passenger's side before getting in.

Sonic is sitting lowly in his seat with a stressed look on his face. When he sees Silver get in though, he offers him a smile, "Hi, Silver."

Silver is silent like he's waiting for more. When he doesn't get anything, he just sighs and leans his head against the door.

He feels really alone right now.

When they get home, Silver is doing his homework at the kitchen table while Sonic is hyper focused on his laptop with his tablet and pen out. He's doing that thing where he's sticking his tongue out like he's really concentrated on something.

Silver hears the front door open an hour or two later. Shadow had gotten home later than usual. He appears in the kitchen shortly after, body soaked with rain water and his shoes hooked on his fingers before he sets them on the doormat, "Taking a shower."

"Mhm," is Sonic's only response as he draws and erases and draws again.

Shadow cocks an eyebrow at him before shrugging it off and heading upstairs.

Silver glances at his dad with a frown. He slowly slides his hand over to Sonic, looking away with embarrassment. He just wants a little bit of attention from him.

Sonic doesn't see it at first, but when he leans back in his seat and stretches he finally does. Sonic smiles down at it, looking a bit tired before placing his hand over Silver's.

They quietly continue working shortly after, Silver's fingers curling around his dad's a bit tighter for support. Sonic squeezes back and it almost feels like a silent reassurance to Silver.

Silver tosses and turns in bed that night. He's having a bad dream, but he's not sure of what. It feels like some sort of memory, but it's distant and foreign at the same time. He crawls out of bed and quietly makes his way down the hallway with his comforter draped around his body. He pushes the door to his parent's bedroom in and peers inside.

His father is in bed sleeping. He twitches back and forth every once in awhile. His fingers are gripping at the empty spot next to him on the mattress where his dad should be. The only thing there is the blanket that is folded over like Sonic had gotten up already.

Silver frowns and makes his way past the room and down the stairs. There's a dim light from Sonic's laptop coming from the living room and Silver carefully makes his way over to it. He feels his eyes well with tears before climbing onto the couch next to him. He presses his head into Sonic's side.

"Silver, you should be in bed," Sonic murmurs soothingly as he places a hand on the kid's back.

Silver sniffs and hides his face under the blanket, "Daddy... Please, stop ignoring me."

"I'm not," Sonic tries to say.

"Yes, you are!" Silver protests, feeling himself finally giving into the sadness that's been building up inside him.

"Oh, Silvy..." Sonic whispers and pulls the crying child into his arms, "I was... I dunno? Giving you space... and..."

"I don't need space," Silver hiccups and presses his face into Sonic's chest because he doesn't want him to see him, "I need my daddy..."

Sonic folds his arms around Silver and holds him close.

"I know you're doing this because of me," Silver whines out and shakes his head, "But I want you. I want you. I want you!"

Sonic is silent for a moment as he pats Silver on the back to help soothe him, "Everything I do is for you, bud. Wanna see what I'm working on?"

Silver nods, smushing his face against Sonic's chest before peeping one eye out of hiding to look at the computer screen. Silver huffs and grumbles out, "It's just your dumb cola logo..."

Sonic snickers quietly and nods, "Yeah, it is."

Silver looks up at Sonic with a pout.

Sonic's features soften as he explains, "I almost gave up on it... I wanted to do this because I wanted to rebrand my name. Maybe make Chaos something that isn't so... scary? I don't know? I'm not sure where I'm going with this, but..."

"You're not making sense," Silver complains.

Sonic sighs and smiles down at him, "I know. I guess what I'm trying to say is that I lost motivation and almost trashed the idea."

"Don't do it then," Silver responds gruffly as he goes to shut the laptop.

Sonic gently stops him and whispers, "I wanna be your dad. I wanna be a *good* dad."

"You are," Silver tells him with big, shiny eyes.

Sonic locks eyes with Silver for a moment and he can feel himself getting overwhelmed for a moment. He takes in a deep breath and looks away with a smile, "Thanks, Silver..." He ruffles the kid's head and continues, "I wanna keep being a good dad too. I wanna make sure you're taken care of in the future so you can follow your dreams."

Silver raises a brow at him like he's confused.

"The deadline for this thing is tomorrow afternoon and I'm doing everything in my power to stay motivated," Sonic pulls Silver closer and places a kiss on his forehead, "You're my motivation right now, kiddo. Once I send in this design and get the check, it's going to you. All of the assets and profits are going in a savings account to pay for your college."

Silver looks stunned for a moment, "Wh...what?"

"I know I'm not as good as Shad-Dad when it comes to supporting you financially, but this is just something I wanna contribute to," Sonic informs him with a sad smile.

"Dad..." Silver whispers as twists around so he can look up at Sonic more comfortably, "You do support me."

Sonic looks away sheepishly.

"You hug me and kiss me and tell me things are going to be alright," Silver states in a sad tone with tears in his eyes, "When I feel like the world is falling apart, you come and help me tape the pieces back together."

Sonic covers his face with his hand and begins laughing. It wet and tangled with a few sobs, but when Sonic uncovers his face again tears are slipping down his cheeks. He holds Silver against his chest and gives him a big, tight hug. "I'll always be here for you, Silvy," Sonic explains in a bright, cheerful tone, "Trust me when I say I've put the pieces of the world back together time and again and I'll do it all over again for you. As long as I'm here, you'll never be alone."

Silver holds onto him tighter when he hears that and feels a smile reach his lips, "I love you, daddy."

"I love you too, Silver," Sonic says softly as he runs his hand down Silver's quills.

Silver falls asleep in Sonic's lap that night as he listens to the light taps of keys and pen scratches. He's never felt more secure than he has now. He was safe in this moment asleep in his dad's lap.

## Parent-Teacher Confrontation



### Chapter Eleven: Parent-Teacher Confrontation

Luckily, things go back to normal with Silver and Sonic. Although Sonic does pull back a little when he feels as though Silver is getting overwhelmed. Transversely, Silver lets his dad goof off without the added attitude because he kind of likes the humor. It does make him feel better when he's down.

A week goes by and it's Friday. Silver is shaking in his skin because the parent-teacher conferences are tonight. He hopes his teacher doesn't say anything about the issue with the checkers at recess that past Monday. He hasn't even attempted to talk to Jet since because he feels like he's in hot water with the Tidal Tempest already.

Silver is rocking back and forth in the corner of his room when Sonic bursts into the bedroom with his guitar in hand. He shreds off a solo and mimics the sound of a crowd going wild before skidding to his knees, "Helloooo, Station Square! How're you doin' tonight!?" Sonic holds up an invisible microphone up to Silver's mouth.

Silver doesn't say anything just turns away.

"I can't hear you!" Sonic shouts again like a hype man, "How're you doin' tonight!?"

"Horrible," Silver shouts back with dread into Sonic's hand.

"What!?" Sonic asks like he's taken aback, "How can you say that? You get to hang out with your two favorite dads tonight."

“As I completely and utterly embarrass myself in front of them and prove just how worthless I am,” Silver says as he grips the two lowest quills on his forehead and tugs them down.

“We’ll be nothing but proud of you,” Sonic assures him as he crawls on his knees closer to the distressed hedgehog.

Silver just grumbles and huddles closer to the corner.

“I know,” Sonic says, hopping on his feet, “Let me play you a song!”

Silver nods his head, “I’d like that.” For some reason he likes to hear his dad’s guitar. It makes him feel safe and happy.

“Alrighty then,” Sonic readies his fingers and a note wails out for a moment before his fingers trek down the fret board in an intricate, but beautifully soft tune. He has a look of concentration as he closes his eyes like he’s feeling the reverberations against his fingertips.

Silver slowly comes out from the corner and sits on his knees as he listens. This one was new. He’s never heard it before, but it’s nice.

Sonic nods his head back and forth to the melody, but he opens one eye and smirks down at Silver.

Silver raises his eyebrow back.

“Here we...!” Sonic jumps in the air and finishes just as he lands on one knee, “...Go!” His fingers go to work on the strings and a pop/punk melody tears itself out of the instrument. It’s fun and hard, but still bouncy enough to jam out to.

Silver’s eyes widen in surprise at that and he gets on his feet, clapping his hands.

This only feeds Sonic’s ego because he loves when Silver gets into it. Sonic jumps to his feet again and hops up and down, doing little tricks here and there for him as he plays.

Silver’s smile widens and he jumps up and down with him. He isn’t as agile, but he has the same energy. They both bounce around to the beat and laugh happily.

Sonic kind of struts around and allows Silver to follow him. Sonic laughs louder when Silver does some poised little poses and Sonic hops onto the bed and does an impressive flip over Silver’s little body.

Silver’s eyes widen in awe at that.

“C’mon! Try it!” Sonic encourages him.

Silver nods wildly and climbs onto the bed. He takes in a breath of air and jumps off.

Sonic sees this and kicks the kid’s feet back and makes sure he sticks the landing.

Silver sees his feet on the ground and gives Sonic a look like he couldn’t believe he did it.

Sonic just winks at him. He angles the neck of the guitar down and motions to it.

Silver looks down at it and gives Sonic a look to see if he’s sure. When Sonic nods back to him, Silver smiles and places his foot on it.

Sonic whips the neck up and the momentum tosses the kid into the air and Sonic rolls on the ground

before landing on his back, catching Silver with his feet at the very last second.

Sonic's feet are holding him up by his torso and it takes Silver a moment to get his bearings on where he is before he's bursting into laughter. Silver instinctively reaches his hands down to Sonic and gives him grabby hands.

Sonic's face softens when he sees that. His hands leave the guitar and hold onto Silver's gently. He leverages Silver up and down with his legs and he watches the kid kicking his legs happily. Sonic just takes in this moment quietly as if relieving a memory before saying, "I used to do this all the time when you were little."

When Silver hears that, he feels himself getting a little embarrassed.

Sonic feels a little bad for ruining the moment and he laughs sheepishly.

"I like this," Silver admits, squeezing his dad's hands a little tighter.

Sonic's face brightens up when he hears that and he lifts his legs up and down again for him.

Silver bursts into a fit of laughter like last time as his body is raised up and down like he's flying.

Sonic pulls the guitar away from his body before vaulting Silver up one more time and catching the kid in his arms, holding him tight.

Silver smiles happily and nestles into his dad's arms. It's a quiet moment before Silver whispers, "What song were you playing?"

"Uh..." Sonic laughs a little awkwardly, "I wrote a jingle for the commercial."

"So, they accepted your design!?" Silver shouts excitedly as he lifts himself up to look at Sonic's face.

"Duh!" Sonic responds like he didn't have a doubt in his mind, "I'm Sonic the Hedgehog. They were practically begging me to do this deal."

"That was the coolest song ever," Silver responds with a wide smile.

Sonic just watches Silver like he's going to start crying from the compliment. He pulls the kid into his arms and gives him a noogie, "You're the coolest *kid* ever!!!"

They both struggle on the carpet. Silver trying to get away and Sonic tickling and cuddling him into submission.

"Enough rough housing," Shadow's voice comes out stern from the doorway.

Silver sees Shadow and he immediately wriggles out of Sonic's grip before sitting up stiffly on his legs, "Y-yes, sir." The quills on his forehead are skewed every which way.

Sonic sees Shadow in the doorway and eyes him up and down. Shadow is wearing crisp, formal-looking button-up and black slacks. The tie is red and he's currently fixing his ring inhibitors over the cuffs of his shirt. Sonic gives him a devious look before making his guitar wail out a 'weet-woo' as if it's whistling at him. "Lookin' good, Shad-Dad," Sonic drawls out with a hungry look.

Shadow's face turns a tinge of red, but he keeps his poised composure, "You had better be ready."

"I'm always ready," Sonic shoots back as he pulls himself back onto his feet. He's wearing a comfy

shirt and hoodie. "It's called business casual," Sonic says, holding his arms out like he's presenting himself.

"You look like a teenager," Shadow scoffs at him before disappearing out into the hallway.

It's Sonic's turn to flush. He couldn't retort with anything because he wasn't wrong. He was immortal and forever going to look like this, but he couldn't say that in front of Silver. Instead, he turns to Silver and runs his fingers through the kid's messy quills, straightening them out before saying, "Ready?"

"For my walk of shame? No, but I don't have much of a choice," Silver explains sadly.

Sonic picks him up by his armpits and sets him down on his feet. "It's gunna be fine," Sonic says as he holds his hand out for him, "I promise."

Silver looks up into his dad's eyes for a moment and sees the confident smile on his face. It takes him a moment, but he smiles back and places his hand into his, "Okay."

The three file into the car and Shadow is adamant about driving. Sonic doesn't really care either way as long as he gets to choose the radio station. Silver is in the backseat trying to not to have a mental breakdown as his dad is singing in perfect pitch to some rock song he's heard like a thousand times before on his way to school. Except this different. The sun is going down and the ride is smooth. For some reason though, it feels less safe than speeding down the street.

Shadow finds a spot in the parking lot and grimaces because he doesn't like parking a vehicle, his or not, so close to others. Before they can even get out though, Shadow starts noticing the teachers about to swarm them. He shoots Sonic a look who gives him a sheepish one back. Shadow creaks his neck and waits for the unsuspecting teachers to approach the driver's side.

"Shadow...? What are you doing?" Sonic asks wearily.

Shadow doesn't respond. He just slowly rolls the window down and glares up at the teachers huddled around. They immediately gasp in horror and almost run into each other. Shadow says in a very sharp and very dignified tone, "If you value your lives, you will stop harassing my husband."

They all nod and scurry away like frantic mice in the face of a hungry cat.

Shadow rolls the window back up looking quite proud of himself, "We'll see how long it keeps them at bay this time."

"Wow," Sonic gives Shadow a very bland slow clap, "Really mature."

"One of us has to be," Shadow says as he twists the keys out of the ignition and heads out.

Sonic looks offended, but keeps quiet because he kind of earned that one. He's actually a little relieved knowing those teachers will be more hesitant to flock around him now. He gets out and opens the door for Silver, allowing the kid to hold his hand as they walk into the building.

Shadow holds the door open for them and makes his way inside after. Seeing all of the parents conversing with one another, Shadow reaches for Sonic's unoccupied hand and purposefully doesn't make eye contact with anyone.

Sonic squeezes both of their hands as a comforting gesture and snickers to himself because they're too cute.



“Sonic! Shadow!!”

Shadow visibly stiffens when he hears their names being called and Sonic reels back a little when he sees who it is. Shadow relaxes in his stance when he sees that it’s just Amy and her family in tow and Sonic takes ten steps back. Both Silver and Shadow nearly panic when Sonic lets go of their hands.

“It’s so good to see you,” Amy exclaims before turning to Shadow, “Both of you this time.”

“You saw us the other day,” Sonic points out snottily.

“Um... Yeah, but I didn’t get a chance to talk. Besides, it’s rude to interrupt a couple when they’re on a date,” Amy retorts with a huff.

“It wasn’t a da—!”

Amy turns back toward Shadow before Sonic can even finish and asks, “You must be busy. I barely see you around anymore.”

“It’s been rough,” is all Shadow says.

Amy sees Silver and her eyes light up, “Oh, hello, Silver!” She kneels in front of him and takes both of his hands, “Look how big you are! You’re growing up so fast!”

Silver doesn’t pull away, but he doesn’t know what to say either. Amy can come on really strong sometimes. In the adult way. Not the boisterous kid way Marine does. He glances past Amy and sees Blaze and sends her a little wave. Blaze just nods back her acknowledgment to him.

Luckily, Marine saves him by throwing herself at him, “Silveerrr! Tell your dad to play with us!”

Silver steadies Marine back to her feet and glances back at Sonic.

“Don’t have to tell me twice,” Sonic kneels down and allows the little raccoon girl to climb on his back.

“All hands on deck! Full speed ahead! These waves are erratic!” Marine shouts, pointing down the hall.

“These waves have nothin’ on me,” Sonic shouts before running full speed down the hallway.

Amy just watches the two go in exasperation, “...and there they go.”

One of the teachers is screaming down the hallway at them, “Mr. the Hedgehog! No running in the hallways!”

To which Sonic shouts very faintly since he’s pretty much gone already, “You’ll never catch me alive!”

Silver frowns when he sees them go. He looks around nervously like he’s lost when he sees a hand come into view. It’s his father’s. He glances up at Shadow who is looking away a bit stubbornly. Silver lifts his hand and places it into Shadow’s, looking away much the same.

He waits patiently as the adults talk and looks around to see if he can spot any of his other classmates.

His eyes widen when he sees Jet. He was walking alone with his board on his arm, looking angry as

ever. Jet stops when he sees Silver staring at him and he sends a glare at him.

Silver glares back at him.

Fear forms on Jet's face for a moment before turning away and heading back down the hall.

Silver smirks as he watches him go, but when he turns to look up he realizes Jet wasn't afraid of *his* glare. It was his *father's*. Silver pales a little at the sight of it, but Shadow's face softens to more of a protective look as he places a hand on Silver's shoulder, guiding him closer to his side. Silver swallows thickly and sees one more flaw in his attempt to befriend Jet. Shadow would literally kill him for associating with Jet

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"Look how small these desks are!" Sonic muses out loud as he tries to sit in one, his knees scrunched up and bent in the process, "Which one do you sit in, Silvy?"

"Uh..." Silver is really uncomfortable. Mrs. Labyrinth looks like she's going to burst a blood vessel.

Shadow just sighs and accepts this as the norm before guiding Silver over to the three seats that are set up in front of the teacher's desk.

Mrs. Labyrinth pulls her glasses up to her face as she looks over Shadow, "I don't believe we've met."

"You met me!" Sonic shouts as he tries to pull himself out of the desk he's now stuck in, "Remember me?"

"Shadow," he informs as he sits down politely, "I am Silver's father."

"Oh," Mrs. Labyrinth says as if something has clicked in her head, "So, Sonic is his...uncle? Cousin...? Older brother...?"

"Um... excuse you," Sonic responds as he leapfrogs over the seat next to Shadow and sits in it, shooting her some finger guns, "I'm also Silver's dad. I'm the *cool* dad."

She looks down at the matching wedding rings on their fingers and sighs as if she's already tired of this. She pulls out some papers and slides a report card in front of the two parents and they both peer down at it.

Silver shrinks back wanting to turn invisible.

"As you can see Silver is doing relatively well in all courses. Nothing horrible...Nothing phenomenal either," Mrs. Labyrinth begins to explain.

"Except for reading and writing," Sonic points out accusingly, "Which is weird because those are his favorite subjects."

The teacher looks offended by how freely Sonic is speaking.

Shadow silently takes the report card and glances over it with a pensive look.

"Look, lady," Sonic goes on, "I heard about how you marked up his report on *Tales from the Arabian Nights*. I signed the thing and you made him redo the report. What's your deal? He knows that story backwards and forwards."

She slams down the new book report, “Maybe *you* know it that well, but Silver certainly does not. Do you think this is funny?” She points down at the paper, “Writing about how companies mass producing goods causes pollution?”

“Dude, that’s literally is what *The Lorax* is about,” Sonic retaliates.

“The way it’s written is much too detailed for someone his age. Also, you sure know an awful lot about your son’s homework, Mr. Sonic,” Mrs. Labyrinth says unmoving, “and I would refrain from calling me...’dude.’”

Sonic stands up sudden and looks down at her, “Of course I know about my son’s homework! What kind of dad would I be if I *didn’t*?”

Shadow places a hand on Sonic’s arm, “Enough.”

“But...! But...! She’s accusing me of *doing* his homework!” Sonic says defensively.

Shadow just exchanges a look with him.

Sonic sighs and sits back down in his seat heavily. He leans back with his legs outstretched and crossed at the ankles. He points from his eyes to the teacher’s as if to say ‘I have my eye on you.’

Shadow holds his hand out and asks, “May I see the report?”

Mrs. Labyrinth nods and hands it over to him.

Shadow’s eyes scan over it and it’s quiet for a long moment. After the first paragraph, he can tell this is in fact Silver’s writing style. It’s more analytical compared to Sonic’s free-form style. When he’s finished, he places it back down and states, “This is my son’s writing.”

Mrs. Labyrinth sits back as if to tell him to continue.

“When he writes, he tends to look for how or why things happen. It’s broken down into a series of events that effects one another like a domino effect,” Shadow explains and points to a few examples on the page, “For instance, here and here. The narrative comes full circle.”

Sonic raises an eyebrow at it and whispers to him, “How the heck can you tell?”

“Because...” Shadow states with a slight smirk, “You tend to focus on feelings and emotions. The focal point is more on the impact of everything and you would try to come up with some sort of optimistic moral or message at the end. Although I’m just speculating because most of your ‘reports’ are verbal. Very rarely do you write anything down. My only assumption is because you don’t want your words set in stone because your opinions constantly change.”

Sonic scoots away from Shadow on his plastic chair and says, “That’s so weird. Don’t analyze me that closely. It freaks me out.”

Shadow turns back to the teacher and explains, “You’re allowed to be weary in these kinds of situations because I’m sure it’s happened many times before, but I can attest that Silver is the one doing these homework assignments.”

Mrs. Labyrinth nods to him, “I agree.”

Sonic shoots her a look and scoots his chair back next to Shadow, “Wait... What!? But *you* said...!”

“I’m starting to see my error,” Mrs. Labyrinth states as she looks over Sonic, “When I saw

your... 'signature' ... I thought it was Silver forging it.”

Sonic glares at her.

“...But now that I’m getting a better image of you, Mr. Sonic. I see now that you’re...” Mrs. Labyrinth drawls out as if looking for the right word, “...juvenile.”

Sonic’s face drops when he hears that and Shadow gives him a sympathetic look.

Mrs. Labyrinth unfolds a piece of notebook paper and lets it fall onto the desk, “I confiscated this from Silver a little over a week ago and I had thought you told him to leave it out for me to take to try and prove something, but...” She’s quiet for a moment before looking down at the papers collectively as if the pieces are coming together nicely, “That isn’t the case and Silver is actually quite gifted in these two subjects. If that’s true, I’ll have him reassigned to a program that will help him hone in on those skills. He’ll remain in my class taking regular subjects, but transfer to another classroom during reading and writing.”

“What!?” Sonic and Silver say simultaneously.

Shadow leans forward and picks up the piece of notebook paper.

Silver gets flustered and pulls his legs up against his chest. He doesn’t want Shadow to read that. That was personal. That had Jet’s name on it. Well, technically it didn’t... but... it kind of was. Aw man, Shadow was going to kill him!

“This is impressive,” Shadow remarks, glancing it over once more.

Silver’s eyes widen when he hears that. Did his *father* just give him a compliment!?

“Lemme see!” Sonic presses into Shadow’s shoulder and reads it. He gasps and gets up, pulling Silver into his arms as he spins him around, “Silvy, that’s so cool! You’ll have to write some lyrics for me!”

“D-daaaad,” Silver whines as he’s getting a little dizzy.

“Sorry! Sorry,” Sonic apologizes as he places the kid back onto his feet, “I forgot you get a bad case of vertigo when I do that.” Sonic doesn’t miss a beat though. He’s back to ruffling his quills and saying, “But this is great news! We’re so proud of you!” Sonic turns to Shadow and asks, “Right, Shads?”

Silver looks up at Shadow with big glassy eyes.

It’s a moment before Shadow responds, but when he does a slight smile pulls at his lips and he nods once to the small hedgehog.

Silver is shaking and his eyes threaten to tear up. He’s glad Sonic wraps his arms around him and pulls him into a hug so no one has to see him almost lose it. Hearing Shadow say that out of everyone else meant the world to him.

His father actually giving him his approval was such an overwhelming thing for him.

“Silver,” Mrs. Labyrinth says as she looks down at the small hedgehog.

Silver peeks his head out of his dad’s chest and nods his head.

“I want to apologize for the misunderstanding,” she tells him with a genuinely apologetic look,

“Would you feel comfortable reading this to your classmates to show them how talented you are?”

Silver just looks at her with surprise. She not only apologized, which she never does, but she also told him he was talented. He steps away from Sonic and wipes the tears away from his face before nodding to her, “Yes, ma’am.”

His parents speak back and forth with the teacher a little more after that. Sonic is a little more comfortable and respectful talking to her now too. Silver is just in awe by how well that all went. He almost couldn’t believe it.

Sonic ends up talking to other parents outside of the building with Shadow at his side and Silver kind of wanders off to go talk to his friends. Although Silver sees Jet surprisingly alone, sitting on one of the concrete steps moving his hover board under his feet back and forth. Silver ducks out of the conversation relatively unnoticed and makes his way over to Jet.

He takes a seat next to him and he sees Jet side glance him. “You look like you’re waiting for something,” Silver points out in confusion.

“Yeah, I’m waiting for you to leave,” Jet grumbles, darting his eyes away.

Silver glares at him for a moment before looking around curiously, “Where are your parents?” He knows what Jet’s dad looks like. He’s presented a photo for show and tell a few times and he never seems to shut up about how amazing his dad is.

Jet rolls his eyes and stands up, “Maybe you should mind your own business.” He hooks his goggles to his face before getting on his board.

Silver gets irritated by that and before Jet can ride away, Silver grabs onto the hover board. His feet drag against the concrete as they turn the corner of the building and his weight causes the board to flip over onto the ground. Silver falls on his butt, but Jet manages to land solidly on his feet.

Silver gets up and rubs his sore behind before running over to the fallen board. He picks it up and makes his way back over to Jet, “What is wrong with you? Why are you acting so weird?”

Jet doesn’t look him in the face just snatches the board back into his arms, “You’re one to talk. You’re the weird one.”

Silver’s face softens because the insult doesn’t have the bite it usually does. Instead, it’s kind of sad sounding. Silver steps in front of Jet, trying to stare him in the eyes. It’s brief, but behind his tinted goggles he can see a single tear fall.

“Are you okay?” Silver asks, legitimately concerned this time.

“Shut up,” Jet tosses his board down and it flips a 180 before he hops back on.

“Your dad didn’t come,” Silver whispers as if putting the pieces together, “did he?”

Jet just lets out an angry noise before his board hums loudly and he flies down the sidewalk. The wind wipes up around Silver and he has to close his eyes tight because the dust cloud left behind is so strong. He coughs the dirty air out of his lungs and when he opens his eyes again Jet is long gone.

Silver’s shoulders sag a little, feeling a mixture of emotions.

They’re cut off though when he hears his friend Marine shouting, “Come on, Silver! Your father is buying ice cream tonight!”

Silver looks back at her and shouts, “C-coming!” He goes to run for her, but stops and looks behind him one more time. The dirt trail in the distance dissipates and Silver frowns before making his way over to Marine who drags him back toward the front of the building.

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Sonic lounges back on his chair and bounces his leg with irritation as he speaks, “Can you believe that woman? The nerve of her. Calling *me* childish! We should report her.”

Shadow just shakes his head, “It’s handled.”

Sonic grumbles and scoops another spoonful of ice cream in his mouth.

“Luckily for you it was a misunderstanding,” Blaze explains softly before looking over at Marine and Silver who are sitting at a kiddie table full of coloring pages and crayons, “We aren’t so fortunate.”

“Oh stop,” Amy replies and places her hand on Blaze’s, “Marine is fine. Her grades are a little iffy, but she’s great with hands-on assignments. We just have to work with her a little more.”

Blaze’s tail flicks with irritation before looking away. She doesn’t argue though.

“Make a game out of it,” Sonic suggests, “If she gets a question right give her a reward. Like... a piece of candy or something.”

Blaze places her finger to her chin and thinks it over, “I think I will try that.” Her eyes meet Sonic’s once more, “Thank you.”

“I’ll give you a piece of candy if you do the dishes,” Shadow bargains with a smirk.

Sonic’s eyes light up for a second, but then he realizes it’s just a joke. He pushes his shoulder into Shadow’s and mumbles, “Jerk.”

The three snicker at Sonic’s reaction.

Sonic presses his palms to his face in embarrassment and groans out, “I’m a man-child that’s never gonna grow up. This is humiliating.”

Shadow places a comforting hand on Sonic’s thigh, under the table and out of sight. “You’ve grown a lot. Trust me when I say that,” Shadow explains in a caring voice, “Your youthful soul is endearing and brings happiness to this family.”

Sonic can feel his face burning with a blush and he whispers to Shadow, “Don’t get all mushy on me...”

Amy just rolls her eyes, “Want me to leave so you and Shadow can actually have a moment?”

“Is that an offer?” Sonic asks her with squinty eyes.

Blaze places a hand on Amy’s shoulder and states, “We should probably get going anyway. It’s getting late.”

Amy sighs, but ultimately agrees, “Yeah, Saturdays are the busiest days at the café.” She smiles at them both before getting up, “It was nice seeing you again, Shadow. Don’t be a stranger, okay?” She glances at Sonic and says with a giggle, “And I’ll see you again tomorrow, Sonic.”

Sonic scrunches his face in disgust and mumbles something about how Amy should have her stuff delivered to him so he doesn't have to see her dumb face every day. He waves them off anyway.

Silver makes his way over to the table after he says his good-byes to Marine and slides a blank coloring sheet and some crayons over to Sonic.

Sonic smirks at him and holds his hand out for a fist bump, "You're the best."

Silver smile back at him. He knows his dad likes coloring with him on his downtime and he figured he'd want to since the opportunity is here. Both their legs swing back and forth as they color in the lines on the paper.

Shadow just watches his husband in silent adoration. He knows Sonic can be a little much at times, but he'd never want to change who he was.

"Daaad," Silver whines when he finally looks up at Sonic's coloring sheet, "Why are you coloring the cow purple!?"

"Hey, I'm a *blue* hedgehog," Sonic retorts with a huff, "There's gotta be purple cows out there somewhere."

Silver gives him a grumpy look before shaking his head, giving up on that argument because he knows it's one he won't win.

# Deployment



## Chapter Twelve: Deployment

Shadow gets a rude awakening the next morning. His phone is practically vibrating and screaming on the nightstand next to him. He rolls over and picks it up groggily, but shoots up when he sees that it's HQ.

"Hello? This is Shadow," he answers instantly.

Sonic groans and opens his eyes slowly, trying to focus his vision. He rolls over and wraps his arms around Shadow's waist, "What's up?"

Shadow places a finger over his lips before nodding as he takes in the information being said to him. He squeezes the bridge of his nose and mumbles back, "You're joking, right?" He winces when he gets a reply and he shakes his head, "Alright... I'll be right there." When he ends the call, he gently guides Sonic's arms away so he can get up.

"Dude, it's Saturday," Sonic points out with a disappointed frown.

"I'm aware," Shadow states as he makes his way out of the bedroom.

Sonic crawls out of bed and quickly follows after him. They walk down the steps together and Sonic waits, hoping he'll tell him what's going on. When he doesn't and makes a b-line to his shoes, Sonic says, "Okay, hold up. What's so important that you have to go in right now."

"I don't want to talk about this," Shadow informs him as he hits the call button on his phone as he



balances it on his shoulder as he pulls his shoes on. When the line finally comes to life he begins to speak, “Zero, did you...?” There’s a pause and Shadow nods, “Alright. Understood. I’ll come pick you up.”

Sonic just looks offended that Shadow’s ignoring him and he taps his foot on the ground impatiently. He does wait until Shadow ends the call though before he asks, “What the heck is going on?”

Shadow looks like he’s fighting with himself between whether or not he should say anything and whether or not he should leave right now. “Look, the situation has gotten worse and I need to go,” Shadow tells him as he makes his way to the door.

“Well, when’re you coming back?” Sonic asks, his nerves spiking like he’s rearing and ready to go with him, “Should I come with?”

Shadow shakes his head, “No, stay here and I’ll...”

Sonic nods like he understands, but he doesn’t really like it. “Just go,” he says, pushing the front door open for him, “Just tell me what’s goin’ on later.”

“I will,” Shadow goes to walk out the door, but stops himself. He lets out a nervous breath of air before turning back and pulling Sonic into a kiss. He pulls away quickly after and winces because within the frenzy of this he’d almost forgotten to kiss his husband good-bye.

Sonic watches him go from the front door and stands there fidgeting. He should be going. He should be out there. This was his fight. He hates being confined here. He grips his arms tightly and looks down in anger.

“Dad?”

Sonic feels all the anger wash out of his system at once when he hears Silver’s voice. He looks back at the kid still in his pajamas and offers a forced smile, “Hey there, kiddo. You’re up early.”

“I felt...” Silver starts to say, but frowns before correcting, “I heard father leave.”

Sonic nods to him, “Yeah, he has to take care of a few things. I’m sure he’ll be back tonight.” Sonic closes the door behind him and makes his way back over to Silver, “Doesn’t mean we can’t have fun though!” He holds his hand out to Silver and guides him into the kitchen, “I’ll make some pancakes! Would you like that?”

Silver squeezes his dad’s hand and tugs him back a little, “Dad, what does father do at work?”

Sonic snorts and turns back around, “Who said he was at work? He’s uh... ya know, getting his bike looked at. That thing is his pride and joy.”

Silver says carefully as he looks up at Sonic, “Is father a soldier?”

Sonic feels himself fidgeting under Silver’s eyes and he looks over to the fridge, “H-hey, I know! I think we bought blueberries. Want blueberry pancakes?”

“Why won’t you tell me?” Silver states, eyes stern and unmoving, looking up at him through his eyebrows.

Sonic sighs and kneels down in front of Silver. He places a hand on his shoulder and begins to explain, “Shadow just... he doesn’t want to bring any of that home with him. He wants to leave it at work.”

“Is he not proud of it?” Silver questions.

“We haven’t talk about it a lot, but... I think he doesn’t want to be an influence,” Sonic responds like he knows he shouldn’t be talking about this without Shadow.

“An influence?” Silver asks like he doesn’t understand.

“Here,” Sonic says getting back onto his feet as he guides Silver over to the sofa. He picks him up and sits him down on the cushions before sitting down with him. “You like Captain America, right?” Sonic asks with a smile.

Silver nods to him, “Very much.”

“Well,” Sonic says, “he’s like Captain America.”

Silver laughs a little, “You mean besides being a government designed super soldier who was frozen for decades?”

Sonic begins to laugh with him, but it dies down rather quickly.

“Dad?” Silver asks.

“Nothing...” Sonic shakes his head and tries to get back on topic, “Anyway, um... So, he’s like a super hero, right? When bad guys do stuff wrong, he goes and kicks their butts!”

Silver just gives Sonic an indignant look, “There’s more to it than just that. It isn’t about just doing it for the fun of it. Being a soldier means assessing a situation and trying to make the right calls. Sometimes there isn’t a clear cut answer. It isn’t just about good guys versus bad guys. Sometimes you *are* the bad guys, but it’s also about serving and protecting as many people as you can even if that means you can’t save everyone. It’s also about calling your own shots when you need to because sometimes not even the government knows the right answers.”

“You’re such a smart kid, Silver,” Sonic comments with a small smile, “I think that’s the main reason why he doesn’t want you to know. There’s... a little bit of him in you.”

“Yeah, but... you fought too, right?” Silver asks, “Why *wouldn’t* I want to be like you two when I got older?”

“We don’t want you to be a weapon, Silver,” Sonic explains softly, “We don’t want you to have to worry about that stuff, ya know? We want you to live a normal, happy life.”

“Normal?” Silver almost laughs at him, “You’re joking, right?” Silver stands up on the couch and gestures to himself, “Look at me! I’m anything, but normal. Do you really think I haven’t noticed how 90% of my classmates are humans?”

“That doesn’t matter. You really think a ratio of how many students look like you matters when I’m talking about ‘normal?’” Sonic responds with sad eyes, “You can socialize and relate to them. You can still make friends. You have a home and two parents to come home to. I’m talkin’ about a stable life, bud.”

“As opposed to what?” Silver asks with a bitter laugh, “The life of a squirrel running around scavenging nuts?”

Sonic feels a little hurt by the comment, but disregards it. “Life... wasn’t always like this,” Sonic murmurs before ruffling Silver’s quills, “C’mon. I’ll make some breakfast.”

Silver watches his dad get up with concern. He wasn't expecting that reaction at all. He thought he was going to laugh with him about it because it really was just kind of a joke. He gets up anyway and makes his way over to the kitchen table. He sits in silence for a moment before saying, "If father brings all of this up later, I'll pretend like I'm hearing it for the first time."

Sonic nods, his back facing Silver as he gathers things together. He says quietly, "Yeah, that's probably for the best, kiddo..."

Silver nods even though he knows Sonic can't see it. He rests his chin on the table and swings his legs back and forth. Maybe there really was a reason Sonic had been avoiding all of this and he shouldn't question it. There's a part of him that is afraid to know and another that desperately needs to. He feels really conflicted about all of this.

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Shadow makes his way into the commander's office with Zero and Omega. Espio and Vector are there along with Topaz standing in front of her desk. The three stand front and center waiting for Topaz to speak.

"Thank you for coming at such short notice," Topaz says apologetically.

"Don't apologize," Shadow assures her, "Just tell us what's going on."

Topaz motions to Espio and Espio steps forward, "We had tried interrogating the mercenaries to get any information we could out of them..."

"And...?" Shadow asks.

"We'll let the pictures speak for themselves," Vector states as he hands a confidential folder over to him.

Shadow eyes Vector with confusion before taking it. He opens it and winces the moment he sees them. He swallows and looks at them closely, as a sour feeling eats away at his gut.

"It was a mass suicide," Espio confirms to them quietly.

Zero lifts his hand to grab one of the pictures and looks devastated by it.

Shadow gives him a concerned look, but turns back to Espio quickly after, "What caused this? How was this even possible?"

"I'm not sure," Espio answers truthfully, "They're looking at the bodies now, but if I were to take a guess I'd say self-induced poisoning. All instances happened at the same time. So, there's no way it wasn't planned."

"Why?" Zero asks like he urgently needs to know.

Espio eyes the jackal like he still doesn't trust him, but answers regardless, "To avoid an interrogation. To prevent any information getting out. They were a cultist group so their cause is more important than their lives." Espio steps forward and turns his tablet for them to look at, "We did capture one of the inmates on camera. Spouting nonsense."

Shadow takes the electronic device and plays the video. It's of one of the mercenaries on the ground shouting over and over, "How much blood is on *your* savior's hands?!" It slowly gets weaker and more slurred before they lay motionless on the ground.

Espio frowns when he sees the slight disturbed look on Shadow's face, "Although it doesn't really make sense. I don't believe Sonic has killed anyone. It could just be the ramblings of their altered state of mind."

Zero shakes his head, "No."

Espio eyes him suspiciously, "Excuse me?"

"They're talking about Shadow," Zero mutters, not making eye contact.

"They referred to Sonic being a savior of sorts," Espio questions, "Why do you believe they're speaking of Shadow suddenly?"

"Because," Zero says with a bitter laugh, "The savior they're referring to is my savior. That message is for me."

Espio pulls out a pen and paper, waving his hand as if urging him to go on.

Zero sighs like this is pointless, "The little blue savior is Sonic because the world believes him to be as such. The Jackal Squad's savior is the doctor because he had saved us from our untimely demise. My savior is Shadow because I rejected wanting to worship the doctor. I had tried to reason with them at one point. Shed light onto their blind ways, but it only proved to almost get me killed. What they are referring to in that recording is that my savior is no better than the doctor because..." Zero trails off for a moment before finishing, "To put it lightly, Shadow's past."

"So, you see Shadow as an object of worship," Espio states, testing him.

"Their words, not mine, detective," Zero simply replies, "Everything with them is so very black and white. If you are not with them then you surely are against them."

Espio's hand falls as if that wasn't the answer he was looking for.

Vector steps in though, "Well, as much as this situation isn't the greatest, at least GUN captured the guys so they can't wreak any more havoc."

Zero shakes his head and laughs at him, "You are joking, right?"

Vector looks confused before stepping forward into his face, "What's so funny?"

"The Jackal Squad is an entire race of jackals," Zero states with amusement, "It is not just a singular group. You either followed them or you died. Either from their swords or left for mother nature to take its course. You could not just *escape*. There was nowhere to escape to."

"Yeah? And how did you get out?" Vector asks gruffly, standing tall to try to intimidate him.

"Playing the cards I was dealt," Zero explains with a shrug, "Falling back in line. Giving them what they wanted. Sometimes that is all you can do to survive. I stayed and I waited for my chance. That chance came when the doctor decided to come back to his base years later. After the doctor was taken in by government officials, I pleaded with the men to take me with. Fortunately, they did. Although I had to make do on my own."

Shadow just eyes Zero like his story doesn't add up, "That would make you... thirteen? Maybe fourteen? GUN just threw you on the streets?"

Zero just shrugs, "You know humans, Shadow. They could not give a damn about us even if they

tried. Their rules do not apply to us. We do not get the same protection.”

Shadow puts together what Zero is saying and he doesn’t like it. He wasn’t wrong though. There was no way in hell the government would have held him in stasis for 50 years if they viewed him as anything besides what he was.

Topaz cuts in, “Humans aren’t perfect, but we are trying. Do not forget that. You are now a government agent, Zero. We will do everything in our power to protect you.”

A small laugh leaves Zero’s mouth as if he’d just heard a joke, but he nods to her respectfully anyway.

Topaz just frowns at that, but she’s onto the next line of business soon after. “Our situation has gotten a lot more aggressive after uncovering this information,” she explains, “These mercenaries are mentally unstable and—if you’re correct about your statement—there are *more* of them. I’ll need Team Dark to lead our other teams out there so we can comb through the perimeter.”

Shadow gives her a confused look, “That could take days. Weeks even. Is that truly an efficient strategy?”

“It’s the only one we have right now,” Topaz states sadly, “If even one of these mercenaries falls through the cracks it could mean trouble for us. With their combat power and Eggman’s master mind, we could be dealing with an all out war, Shadow.”

Shadow just turns with a tsk and states, “Fine, just inform me when dispatch gets here.”

“I’m sorry, Shadow...” Topaz says like she means it, but Shadow is already out the door.

Shadow does his best to use his locker as a form of privacy as he hears the rings from his cell phone in his ear. He waits until he hears it pick up.

Sonic’s voice hits his ear and it’s just as bright and optimistic as it always is, “That was like...what? A half hour? That’s a new record. Must have been a false alarm.”

“Sonic,” Shadow murmurs quietly before sighing, “I’m not coming home tonight.”

It’s silent on Sonic’s end for a moment before his voice comes back smile and all, “That’s okay. Don’t even worry about it. I’ll see you first thing tomorrow.”

“No...” Shadow winces and swallows thickly before saying, “The probability of me being home tomorrow morning is slim to none.”

“Oh...” Sonic’s voice wavers a little before he asks, “When *are* you coming home then?”

“I’m not entirely sure,” Shadow mumbles as he scrubs his forehead with annoyance, “Maybe a week or two.”

It’s completely silent on Sonic’s end this time.

“Sonic?” Shadow questions softly.

“No, it’s cool, dude. Like, I know you have to take care of stuff,” Sonic responds in a cheery voice.

Shadow clutches his eyes shut because he knows Sonic. He’s upset. He’s just hiding it. Shadow presses closer into his locker and whispers, “I’ll keep you informed the moment I get a better idea of when that will be.”

“Yeah! Of course. It’ll...” Sonic trails off like he’s trying to figure out what to say, “Everything will be fine.”

“I’ll be back, love,” Shadow assure him.

“Don’t get all mushy on me, dude,” Sonic says with a laugh, but it doesn’t have the life it usually does.

“May I speak with Silver,” Shadow asks with a sigh because he’s disappointed with himself for making him upset.

Sonic doesn’t reply. Instead, there’s more silence followed by muffled noises and Silver’s voice reaches his ear, “Hello? Father?”

“Yes,” Shadow confirms.

“You never talk to me on the phone,” Silver jokes.

Shadow makes a mental note of trying to fix that in the future. “I need to take care of things on my end. Be good for Sonic. That’s an order, alright?” Shadow tells him.

Silver laughs a little before responding with an eye roll, “Yes, sir.”

“I mean it,” Shadow grits out, “If I hear you’ve given him a hard time...”

“I won’t,” Silver replies more serious this time, “You have my word.”

“Good,” Shadow nods, “I love you, Silver.”

Silver feels really flustered by that all of a sudden. His father rarely tells him that. He swallows before muttering back with embarrassment, “I love you too...”

“Give the phone back to Sonic,” Shadow instructs firmly.

Sonic voice returns shortly after, clearer now that he’d been given some space, “Hey, Shad-Dad.”

“I love you, Sonic,” Shadow whispers.

Sonic is quiet for a moment before saying, “Seriously. I can drop him off with Tails and come with you. It’ll be like a new adventure.”

Shadow shakes his head, “No, this isn’t an adventure. We’ll all do something together when I get back to make up for it.”

“Okay,” Sonic says, really put off by it, “But Shadow...”

“Yes?” Shadow asks.

“You’re doing the dishes when you get back,” Sonic says with a snicker.

A sad smile forms on Shadow’s lips as he responds, “If that’s my punishment.”

“Oh, you know it is! It’s gunna be like the biggest pile of dishes yet!” Sonic responds with a cocky tone, “So, get your rubber gloves ready!”

Shadow sighs and leans his arm against the locker. He doesn’t respond so the line goes quiet.

"I love you too, Shadow," Sonic says like he hadn't forgotten he didn't say it back.

"Mh," Shadow nods, "I know."

"And keep that new guy's ass in line," Sonic jokes a bit snarky.

"Dad!" Silver's voice is heard from the distance.

"Butt! I said butt!" Sonic shouts in a panic, "You heard me say butt!"

Shadow can't help but find it cute. He cradles the phone closer to his face wishing it was Sonic. "I have to go," Shadow informs him, "Take care."

"You too," Sonic says happily, "Bye!"

He catches Silver's little "bye" in the background as well before ending the call.

It was only a few weeks. He's done missions like this before. Although those were before he's had a family. He tries not to dwell on it. He closes his locker as he sees all of the other soldiers suiting up. He wonders if they'll really need this many men. Perhaps it was just a safety precaution.

He makes his way over to Zero and Omega who are standing off to the side. Shadow directs his question at Zero specifically, "Are you ready?"

"Everything I own is already on me," Zero jokes lightly as if that weren't morbid at all.

Shadow just nods in understanding.

Why wouldn't he? The place Zero lives doesn't exactly scream secure and the life before this wasn't exactly suitable for that kind of lifestyle either. Zero seems content with this idea and Shadow wonders if it's just something ingrained into him.

Shadow had lived a similar life after he had lost everything. He felt he only needed to live out of his locker. After everything in his life had gotten taken away from him and he woke up in this new, strange world. He was afraid of having anything tangible in fear of having it taken away again.

That was years ago now. Over a decade. Now, he has a lot more to lose and he doesn't ever want to lose that. He doesn't want to have a hard reset of his life again. He doesn't know if he could bare that. He doesn't know if he has the strength to pick the pieces back up and start all over again.

He supposes that doesn't much matter though. A sick part of him is actually relieved about doing this mission with Zero instead of Rouge. Zero has no attachments to anything. He doesn't have a family, a home, or anything tangible. It's a harsh thing to think and he knows it's wrong because everyone deserves something like that, but it's easier to fight alongside him.

As they're being lifted over to Prison Island, Shadow is already sick of looking at this jungle. He's tired of being here and being shipped over here. Knowing he's going to be here for awhile isn't very comforting either.

"Hey, try not to look so glum," Zero says comically sarcastic, "We are only about to commit mass genocide."

Shadow shoots him a look, but shakes his head.

"Must not be anything new though," Zero continues on anyway, getting a few horrified looks from the other soldiers, "At least this is contained on one landmass."

Shadow gets what he's referring to. At least it didn't happen at the core of Central City like when the Black Arms attacked. It still isn't very funny though.

"Try not to disturb the other soldiers," Shadow murmurs over to him as discretely as he can considering their situation.

"Oh, I am truly sorry," Zero speaks to Shadow while staring at said soldiers, "I forget humans are so easily excitable. Then again, I suppose I would be too if I had a fraction of my strength and twice as much to lose."

"Everyone is a unit here, Zero," Shadow reminds him, "We're part of the same team and on the same side. We all have the same goal."

Zero lets out a short laugh and leans into Shadow to whisper, "Look at them, Shadow. Do you really think they see you as one of them? We are nothing more than weapons that they so easily hide behind."

"It's less about what others think of me and more about keeping the peace and protecting as many people as we can," Shadow states sternly.

"Ah, yes. As many *people*," Zero sits back comfortably and revels in watching the others squirm, "We cannot have the peace being disturbed. Otherwise they scurry into a panic."

"Zero, it's best to keep your opinions to yourself," Shadow warns him.

Zero leans in to whisper so Shadow is the only one who can actually hear it this time, "You think they keep their opinions to themselves?"

"I'm aware of what is being said about me," Shadow grits out, getting tired of Zero arrogance, "I choose to not let it affect me because I can't afford to lose focus."

"Because you are the strongest," Zero points out deviously, "You carry this team. You carry the entirety of GUN."

"No, I don't," Shadow states stubbornly.

Zero laughs loudly at that, "Please, Shadow! Do not be so humble that it causes you to be delusional. Why do you think you are the leader of the strongest military team? Why do you think GUN uses you every chance they get? Why are you the one having to lead all of these men on this mission? They call you and you come running the moment they do. You are so blatantly aware that the protection of this planet lies in your hands solely. Yet you sit here and lie to me and tell me you do not carry the entire military force of the United Federation."

"Enough, Zero. Not another word from you until we land at our destination. That's an order," Shadow says like he's trying to contain his anger.

"Yes, sir," Zero replies still in his lax pose as he offers a condescending salute to him.

When they do finally land, Shadow quickly pulls Zero to the side before anyone is given their orders. He grabs Zero's arm roughly and pushes him up against one of the cinderblock walls, staring angrily into the jackal's amused eyes.

"Now that is a scary face, Shadow," Zero jokes, "It looks good on you."

"This isn't a game, Zero. Lives are on the line while we're out here and I don't have time to babysit



you every time you decide to run that big mouth of yours,” Shadow explains roughly.

“I just speak the truth,” Zero says a bit aloof.

“It isn’t about truth. It’s about *respect*,” Shadow seethes, “And if you’re so hung up on the truth, here’s a thought... These people who you’re speaking down upon rescued you from your own situation. Without them? Without GUN? You would be on a different side in this battle.”

“Well, that was the case for me,” Zero responds with a shrug, “Except I had to beg on my knees for their help. Not exactly the most dignified way to be saved. It is not like they went out of their way to *find* me.”

“I get it, Zero. I was young and believed the world owed me something, but it doesn’t. The brutal reality is that you have to pick yourself off the ground once in awhile. Not everyone is going to give a damn about your past and you’re going to have to prove to them you’re worth something. The moment you start spitting in the faces of the people who are trying to help you, is the moment you’ll find that you’re cutting off your own life support,” Shadow states forcefully to make sure his words are getting through to him, “Whether you or anyone else likes it or not, we need to stand together united. The moment we start clinging to this ‘them/us’ mentality is the moment we lose because we’re dividing up our own forces and leaving our defenses weakened. No one can afford that. So Zero, I implore you, get these disgusting thoughts out of your head right now and focus on what’s important.”

Zero looks away, finding Shadow’s eyes a bit too intense for his liking. He sighs and holds his hands up in surrender for him. “Alright, Shadow,” Zero says in defeat, “Your point has been made.”

“Good,” Shadow’s hand falls away from the wall and eases away from Zero. Shadow gives him a sympathetic look before saying, “I know this is hard for you, Zero. Going up against your own kind because they’re threatening your freedom and the freedom of others isn’t easy, but it must be done. I want you to know you aren’t alone and you don’t need to constantly hide behind a face of indifference.”

A hint of vulnerability flash across Zero’s face for a moment before it hardens into anger, “Fear and pain are just your body’s reaction to unnecessary stimuli. I’ve already hardened my heart to it years ago.”

Shadow just looks at him like he doesn’t believe him. He doesn’t argue with him though. Sometimes it’s better this way. Different soldiers have different ways of coping with the pain. If Zero’s was pretending it wasn’t there, he didn’t feel it was needed to try and take that away from him.

Shadow leaves him with his own thoughts as he waits for the choppers to arrive and be given their final orders.

## Jet Wash



### Chapter Thirteen: Jet Wash

Silver finds himself shifting in bed that night. He feels like he's running away from something, but he doesn't know what it is. His legs kick before being jolted awake by a loud noise. He breathes heavily and huddles closer to his blankets, feeling tears prick at his eyes. He rolls over and sees a small light on from down the hallway and he crawls out of bed.

He makes his way to his parents' room and peeks his head inside. His dad is sitting up with a small light on, paging through a book. Silver wonders if he should bother him.

It doesn't really matter either way because Sonic sees him, "Hey, kiddo. Can't sleep?"

Silver looks away nervously before stepping all the way into the doorway. He shakes his head.

"Yeah, me neither," Sonic says with a sad smile, "Wanna sleep in here tonight?"

Silver nods his head.

Sonic moves over a little and folds the comforter back for Silver. Once the kid is successfully snuggled up next to him, he folds the blanket back over him and they settle down together.

"What are you reading?" Silver asks softly. He sees his dad present the cover of *The Sword in the Stone* to him and his eyes get big and wide. He cuddles in closer and shyly asks, "Can you read to me like you used to when I was little and had trouble sleeping?"

“Of course,” Sonic snickers and pages back to the beginning.

Silver listens to his dad’s soothing voice. It’s just comforting and warm to hear. His eyes begin to flutter closed sooner than he’d expected. Moments ago, he was wide awake and didn’t think he’d be able to fall asleep. Now though he was fighting to stay awake so he could hear more of the story. It’s a battle he slowly loses and his body completely relaxes as sleep overcomes him.

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Silver has had the same dream every night since. He isn’t sure what it means, but sleeping next to his dad has become a regular. He also never realized how much of a presence his father had in the house. Before he was easily overlooked like white noise, but now that it’s quieter it’s a lot more noticeable.

The absence of his small comments here and there left Silver feeling lonelier than he thought he would. It’s a strange feeling. One he couldn’t really describe to anyone even if he tried.

Monday comes and Mrs. Labyrinth has Silver read his writing to the class. Even while reading it, he can recollect that surge of energy he had gotten from racing Jet for the first time. He even smirks at Jet when he reads the words ‘jet wash’ and he can see the fire in Jet’s eyes. It’s as if it’s a personal message only the two of them can understand and it’s kind of exhilarating.

His new reading and writing teacher is Mr. Marble. He’s a strange guy with fiery red hair, but a slow demeanor to him. He’s really nice though and patient with Silver. There are about seven other kids with him and most are older than him. Luckily, their assignments are varied so Silver doesn’t have to catch up on anything. He even lets Silver choose his own books he wants to read. The class is anything but boring. It’s really refreshing.

The moment Silver steps out onto the playground for recess though, Jet is waiting for him and he’s not happy. Silver tries to keep his cool though because he knows he started this fire.

“So, what? You think you’re cool now because you can read some books?” Jet mocks, kicking some of the woodchips in Silver’s direction.

“You’re talking to me now? Wow, I must be cool then,” Silver shoots back with his hands on his hips.

Jet’s face gets red at that comment and he steps forward into Silver’s face, “You think that makes you cool? Now way! You’re a snobby bookworm that thinks he’s too good for everyone.”

“You can insult me for being smart all you want, but that just makes you look dumb,” Silver states blandly.

Jet gasps when he hears some of the classmates ‘oooh’ at Silver’s comment like it was supposed to hurt. Jet throws his board down and says, “Are you looking to get beat in another race that badly? Fine, let’s go.”

Silver’s eyes widen when he realizes what Jet is saying. He doesn’t even feel upset by it. “Really?” Silver asks a little starry-eyed.

“Uh...” The reaction throws Jet for a loop, but he returns to his normal cocky self, “Yeah, really! You have five minutes to meet me at the jungle gym or I’m leaving without you.”

Silver lets out an excited noise and runs toward the building. He’s hopping up and down while talking to a teacher to let him back into the classroom so he can grab it.

Jet watches Silver get escorted into the building and he smiles to himself a little.

Wave comes up and smirks at him, “You must like him if you’re giving him a second chance.”

Jet scoffs at her, “Whatever. I just want to put him in his place once and for all.” He turns to walk toward the starting point of their race.

Wave just shakes her head at him.

Silver returns to the playground, riding on his makeshift board with Marine riding on the nose of it. Apparently she was so excited about the race, she needed to jump on and experience it firsthand.

“Hi-ho, Silver! Away!” She shouts at the top of her lungs.

Silver is just laughing at her and bends his knees lower to increase their speed. He can see Jet waiting for him so he zooms in fast and skids to a stop. Woodchips and dust sputter in the green hawks direction and Silver mock apologizes, “Sorry, I didn’t see you there.”

“I did!” Marine shouts as she hops off the board, “What a ride!” She throws her fists up in the air.

Jet just glares at Silver, not at all liking his newfound cockiness. Jet turns his attention onto the roughed up board and comments, “You’re really gonna race me with that thing?”

Silver looks Jet over like he’s pretending to figure out a hidden equation before saying, “Maybe you really *are* a chicken. I mean, your dad might be a hawk, but your mom was definitely a chicken.”

Jet just gets into a ready position when he hears Silver say that and he growls out, “There’s no way you’ll beat me with that fake board.”

“Hey, it exists,” Silver counters as he bends his knees getting ready himself, “*It must* be real.”

Jet stares at Silver for a long moment as if he’s trying to crack a code of some kind. The way his quills rise and fall. It all looks very familiar somehow. He shakes himself out of his stupor when he hears the countdown and he focuses his attention ahead of him.

As Wave and Marine shout ‘One!’ they’re off, leaving whipping winds in their wake.

Jet is in the lead right off the bat. He isn’t playing around today. He was willing to accept a loss from an actual board, but not this hunk of junk Silver tossed together. He glances over his shoulder and sees Silver not far behind.

Silver grits his teeth. Jet is going a lot faster than last time and it’s hard enough to keep up. He’s going as fast as he can possibly go and his legs are shaking again. He’s bending his knees lower, but no matter how much he tries to accommodate for it, Jet is flying.

Was Jet going easy on him last time?

Silver thinks back on Jet’s words about wanting a fair race. Maybe Jet was going easier on him because it was his first time on a board. Great, now he was going to make a fool out of himself. Silver’s legs waver a bit and his board veers to the left. Silver is expecting to fall back, but he doesn’t. He’s actually going faster. It isn’t until then he realizes he’s riding on Jet’s currents.

Silver suddenly remembers Jet’s words:

*“It’s like a wave. You have to ride with it. Not against it.”*

Silver focuses his eyes and tries to feel the wind around him. He can suddenly see it. The wind currents all around them. That's exactly what he needed to do. Silver bends his knees and jumps with his board into the air and lands right in front of Jet.

"Sorry," Silver apologizes before hitting up the next current and riding it.

Jet is stunned when he sees this.

Wave shoots Storm a look and motions her head toward the two racers. They both throw their boards down and fly after them.

"Hey! Where're you goin'!?" Marine shouts angrily.

Silver smiles when he sees the soccer field getting closer and closer. He might actually have a fighting chance at beating Jet if he keeps this up. Silver winces when he feels a sudden shock to his board. He glances around and sees Wave and Storm boxing him in. He tries to swerve and swivel around them, but they have a better handle on their boards. Storm laughs and knocks into him hard and Silver nearly loses his balance. It's one more rough smash to his board and Silver feels the gravity shift around him.

There's a blur of green though and Silver's arm is being pulled away from the board. His knee lands on a stable surface and he's being held up by the arm. He looks up and sees that it's Jet. Why was he helping him?

Jet stops right at their finish line and drifts his board around to face Wave and Storm.

"What'd you do that for?" Storm asks incredulously.

"I don't *want* help," Jet states angrily, "Cheating is *worse* than losing! If you think I need to cheat in order to win, what does that say about me? I'm as fast as I am not because I play dirty. No, I worked hard to get to where I am! And the fact that you two dolts think that I need to cheat just says that you don't believe in me enough to win my own races!"

"But Jet...!" Wave tries to defend.

"No buts! We're going to have another race later and I don't want you two anywhere near it! Understand?" Jet responds heatedly.

The two look away shamefully, but nod their heads.

Jet feels Silver winces under his grip and he loosens it enough to help the hedgehog back down to his feet. "Are you okay?" Jet whispers so only Silver can hear.

"Yes," Silver nods as he rubs his arm a bit. He slowly looks up at Jet and offers a smile to him, "That was severely cool, Jet."

Jet's eyes widen a bit as he looks down at Silver. Silver's iridescent quills shimmer in the sunlight like diamonds. His eyes are gleaming like gold. Jet feels his face heating up a little and he notices he's still holding onto Silver's arm. He lets go suddenly and turns away, "Yeah, whatever. Just learn to ride a board so you don't have to rely on me all the time."

"I will," Silver responds before walking to retrieve his board, "Just name the time and place. I'll be ready." He waves Jet off and meets Marine halfway, walking away with her.

Jet slowly turns back around to sneak one last look at Silver as he's leaving. How was Silver riding

that well on that crummy old board?

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“It’s been three days, Omega. Are you sure you can’t detect *anything*?” Shadow asks as they make their way through more vegetation. Shadow stops at a small clearing and glances up at Zero who is hopping from one tree branch to another. Shadow had ordered him to take the high ground, but honestly it just looks like Zero is having a little too much fun up there. He has to admit one thing though. The kid can jump.

“Scanning... Scanning...” Omega’s systems whirl, but the results are still the same, “Negative.”

“Are you sure there are more out here?” Shadow asks up to Zero who is perched on a tree branch, “I’m getting the feeling all of our efforts are in vain.”

Zero hears Shadow’s words and steps off the side of the branch he’s on and lands effortless next to him, “They can sense us. They are maneuvering around our troops,” Zero explains.

Shadow rolls his eyes and pushes past Zero, “There is no way they can track us without getting a reading from Omega.”

“They are not using trackers,” Zero responds.

“What?” Shadow questions suspiciously.

“That is why I suggested sending the robot out as a decoy last time,” Zero recalls out loud, “We can smell fear. We can sense it from miles away.”

Shadow thinks back on that mercenary he’d killed. He did mention something similar to that. Shadow eyes Zero and asks, “And you? Can you sense fear too?”

“Of course I can,” Zero states as if it were obvious.

“Well, track them then,” Shadow snaps at him.

“Ah, yes. If it were that easy I would have done so by now,” Zero replies with a tired look.

“What do you mean?” Shadow asks with a snarl.

Zero runs a hand through his hair and looks away with anger and shame. “I...” He starts to say, but feels his throat closing up.

“Tell me,” Shadow demands, getting into his face, “I’m not running a fool’s errand for weeks on end! If I’m out here, I’m going to make it count!”

“Alright, alright... Easy,” Zero holds his hands up in defense. Zero sighs and murmurs quietly, “I can sense fear, but... my own fear is so potent that I cannot sense anything else. Besides, I doubt *they* can feel any emotion at all other than the primal urge to kill.”

Shadow backs off a little when he hears that. It must have taken a lot for someone as prideful as Zero to admit that. It does make sense. Those other mercenaries seemed like they had no fear whatsoever. Even in their final moments, they didn’t even fear death.

“Thank you...for sharing that,” Shadow tells him gruffly.

“No use in hiding it,” Zero grumbles stubbornly, “It seems nothing gets past you.”

“We’re all scared, Zero,” Shadow informs him.

“Yeah?” Zero says with a bitter laugh, “And what could the Ultimate Life Form be afraid of?”

“We all fear the same thing,” Shadow states sternly, “Being stripped from our lives back home.”

Zero snickers like he can’t believe what Shadow’s saying.

“Joke about it. Hide behind a smile, but it’s your freedom you’re afraid they’ll take that from you,” Shadow explains, “You might not have much now, but it’s still something. It’s a start. You’ve been given a chance to start new.”

“I don’t want anything more than what I have,” Zero tries to counter, “I have lost everything and I have never felt more free.”

“I’m not going to argue with you, Zero,” Shadow says a bit softer, “but that never felt like freedom to me because I knew that was bullshit. It took me awhile to realize it, but if I truly had nothing then why did I still have life?”

Zero just stares at Shadow like he’s confused about something. He circles around him once before murmuring, “You have changed.”

“I have,” Shadow confirms with a nod, “And you can do the same. It isn’t too late to be a better version of yourself.”

Zero’s eyebrows raise as if he’s finally realized Shadow’s words, “I will remember that, Shadow.”

It’s Shadow turn to be confused by Zero’s words. For some reason, he’s starting to question if Zero really does understand what he’s saying. He doesn’t waste any more time talking about this though. Instead, he radios HQ and requests to have some drones sent their way so they don’t have to solely rely on Omega to weed these mercenaries out of their hiding places.

## Absence and Execution



### Chapter Fourteen: Absence and Execution

For the next week, Silver asks Sonic if he can stay after school. Naturally he says yes and Silver uses the empty playground to work on his balance and control. Although he's finding that it's much harder than he expected. If he wants to win this thing, he's going to need to learn how all of this works.

Of all the classmates that come up to him during his practice, he doesn't expect to see Jet. He stands in front of Silver and Silver has to skid to a stop in order to prevent from ramming right into him. He breathes a sigh of relief before hopping off his board. "Don't do that, Jet," Silver says with a bite to his voice, "I could have really hurt you."

"I knew you'd stop," Jet responds before laying his board down next to Silver's. "You're still standing with your legs too close together. You need to spread your legs and keep your stance loose," Jet begins to explain.

"What?" Silver asks in confusion.

Jet sighs and steps off his board. He motions to Silver's, "Get on."

Silver doesn't know why he's listening to him, but he does anyway. He moves his legs farther apart, "Like this?"

"No, a little more," Jet states, pushing them apart wider so one foot is toward the front and the other toward the back, "If you put all of your weight on the middle of the board, your turns won't be as



sharp. That and you'll keep falling on your face."

"O-oh... Alright," Silver responds like he's lost. He looks down at his legs. It feels a little weird because he's not used to it.

"Try bending your knees now. You should be able to get your body lower. The lower you are, the more speed you'll gain," Jet goes on to explain nonchalantly.

Silver just nods to him and bends his knees lower. Jet was right. He was able to get lower to the ground, it just strains his legs a little.

"The more you do it, the better you'll get," Jet simply says.

"Thank you," Silver says with sincerity.

"Yeah. Whatever," Jet brushes it off before stepping onto his own board. He does a few tricks out of boredom.

"Thank you for sticking up for me too," Silver adds.

"I didn't...!" Jet starts to say, his voice cracking, "I didn't stick up for you. I was sticking up for *myself*!"

"Whatever you say, Jet," Silver murmurs to himself with a small laugh.

Jet feels the embarrassment from before and he looks away stubbornly. He rides up to the front of Silver's board and pulls out a pair of blue tinted goggles, "H-here."

Silver's eyes widen when he sees them and he goes to grab them in awe. He stops though and looks back up at Jet, "Are you sure?"

"I have a million pairs at home," Jet scoffs like it's nothing, "I won't miss them or anything. It's just so nothing gets in the way of our race."

"I really appreciate it," Silver says with a smile before taking them. He carefully secures them to his head, but they get woven in his quills.

Jet grimaces when he sees that and he pushes Silver's hands out of the way, "Here! Let me do it!" He steps off his board and onto Silver's before untangled them out of Silver's mess of forehead quills and slipping them over his eyes. Jet glares at him and remarks, smacking the back of his hand lightly against Silver's forehead, "You're hopeless."

"I guess so..." Silver says with a laugh, "but that's why I have you here."

Jet gives him a disgusted look and steps back onto his own board and circles around Silver, "Let's do some laps around the playground so you can build up some strength in those scrawny legs of yours."

Silver looks down at his legs in shock, but sees Jet rushing off ahead of him. "Hey!" Silver shouts as he speeds off after him, "I thought you said you hated cheating!"

"We aren't racing," Jet points out, lowering his body and gaining more speed.

Silver does the same. He wasn't winning and this race seemed more casual, but it was a lot of fun. He felt like he was getting closer to Jet somehow. Like maybe them being possible friends in the future wasn't completely out of the question.

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GUN's plan on luring out the Jackal Squad has been successful, but looking around at everyone, Shadow can tell it's become soul shattering. Every mercenary they've come across or detained has not survived. At this point their orders are just to kill on sight. Prison Island has become an extraction point to haul bodies away from both sides.

Shadow had hoped he'd never have to see something like this again, but he was holding together fine for now. Night terrors here and there, but otherwise stable.

Zero on the other hand, Shadow isn't sure what to make of it yet. Each time they come across a jackal and in their dying breath mocks him, Shadow can see the anger building up more and more in his eyes. Zero hasn't yet killed anyone. Shadow hasn't allowed it. He can tell he isn't mentally stable for something like that. Not yet anyway.

Shadow requests a private quarters to make his phone call once morning comes. He knows it's much too early to be calling home, but he isn't sure when he'll get another chance to do so. He was needed back out there to direct more teams in.

Sonic answers the call groggily, "Hello?"

"Hey, sorry to call so early," Shadow apologizes.

"No, no! It's cool," Sonic shuffles on the other line and Shadow is assuming he's sitting up. Shadow is concerned because he sounds a little more jittery than he's used to, "What's up, Shadow? Are ya coming home?"

Shadow doesn't want to say anything. They've been at this for a week and a half and barely made a dent. The jackals are experts in camouflage and can maneuver all over the place. So, 'combing the perimeter' was as successful as trying to get rid of an infestation one section at a time. There's progress, but how much is hard to tell.

Sonic takes Shadow's silence as a no. "How much longer?"

"Things haven't exactly been going according to plan," Shadow responds, trying to dodge the question.

"Dude, just come home. Let Egghead do his dumb plot and let me take care of the rest," Sonic says with an impatient tone.

"It's a lot more complicated than that," Shadow presses to explain.

"GUN makes everything complicated," Sonic retorts with annoyance.

This wasn't a fight he was going to win. So, he steers the conversation in another direction, "How are things on your end?"

"My end?" Sonic asks a little louder, but stops for a moment. It goes quiet and the soft sound of the door closing hits his ear. Shadow recognizes Sonic's familiar footsteps as he's padding down the stairs. Shadow can almost feel the cool kitchen tiles under his feet. Sonic's voice finally comes back and it's normal volume now, "My end is wrecked. Waiting around and doing nothing isn't *me*. All of this is driving me crazy. I wanna be out there with you."

"This isn't a run-of-the-mill mission, Sonic," Shadow says quieter like he doesn't want to tell him, "There are no survivors this time."

“What?” Sonic asks around a dumbfounded laugh, “What the heck is GUN doing out there?”

“It isn’t GUN’s fault,” Shadow responds tiredly.

“Of course it is,” Sonic tries to say, “They’re the military. They call the shots.”

“Our hands are tied,” Shadow admits feeling shame in the pit of his stomach.

Shadow can hear the familiar impatient tapping of Sonic’s foot on the ground. It stops and Sonic sighs like he’s given up. “How many?” Sonic whispers as if it’s a secret.

Shadow knows what he’s asking. He really doesn’t want to remember any faces today. “I’m trying not to think about it,” Shadow murmurs back as if the walls have eyes and somehow what he’s being ordered to do is wrong.

“Holy crap, Shadow...” Sonic mumbles in awe.

“It’s not a sight I want you to see,” Shadow goes on, “I hate to admit it, but... The Black Arms were easier. They seemed otherworldly, foreign... A parasite more than living-beings. But this is...”

“Are you okay?” Sonic asks carefully.

“I will be,” Shadow confirms sternly, with no doubt in his mind.

Sonic shifts and Shadow is assuming he’s leaning against the counter in a lethargic way like when he’s upset about something, “It’s killin’ me not being there and doing my thing. This house is starting to feel... kinda...” He doesn’t finish.

Shadow doesn’t need him to. The message his loud and clear. Being a hero is written in the very fabric of his being. When something goes wrong he can’t think of anything else but it until it’s over. For this to last as long as it has, Sonic must be going stir crazy.

“Go visit your brother for a little bit,” Shadow suggests, “Or tell me how Rouge is doing.”

“Call her yourself, doofus,” Sonic says with a small laugh, “I’m sure she’d like to hear from you.”

Shadow makes a displeased noise, “Don’t bring up work around her.”

“Okay. You win. I won’t,” Sonic says in defeat. It’s silent for a long moment and Sonic has a feeling he knows what that means, “You gotta go?”

“Yes,” Shadow says like he hates admitting it.

“Okay. I love you, Shadow,” Sonic with an eerie seriousness to it.

Shadow is waiting for a joke or a sarcastic remark, but he doesn’t get anything. He furrows his brow because he knows he’s been gone too long and the uncertainty is causing Sonic pain.

“You can tell me you miss me,” Shadow says softly.

Sonic’s breath hitches a little before he says, “Isn’t that a given?”

“I suppose,” Shadow responds, a smile crossing his face because Sonic’s sassy comeback is all he really needs to hear to know he’s okay, “I love you too, Sonic.” Only then does he feel comfortable ending the call. Shadow looks down at the small screen of his cell. The picture they had taken at the café his background. He lets out a sigh and holds the phone up to his chest for a moment before

getting back up so he can get ready for their next wave of attack.

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Silver feels the laughter bubble up into his chest as he bends his knees more and zooms up next to Jet.

It's been a regular occurrence that Jet meets him after school is over. He gives Silver pointers and rides with him and everything just seems okay between them. Of course this is only in this moment. During school and recess are different stories, but afterschool was all for them.

"You're actually keeping up with me this time," Jet says smugly.

"Was that a compliment?" Silver asks jokingly.

"No way! Just stating the obvious," Jet announces back before speeding up.

Silver does the same and they're both headed toward the soccer field. They both get there at the exact same time and Jet lulls to a stop before collapsing back against his board in a relaxed manner. Silver sees this and pulls up next to him, attempting to do the same. It's a little more wobbly and Silver lays back a bit stiffly.

"I still can't believe that board can keep up with mine," Jet muses as he stares up at the sky, watching the clouds march by.

"Why? What's so special about yours?" Silver asks.

"Well, it's made from Ancient Babylonian Technology. The only ones who know about that are Babylonians," Jet explains as he pillows his arms behind his head, "The technology is way more advance than anything known to man."

Silver's head perks up a little and he asks, "Baby...what?"

"Babylonians. They're an ancient race that lived thousands and thousands of years ago. Supposedly there used to be a lot of us, but now there's only me, Wave, Storm, and my dad. The only thing left are ancient artifacts from long ago," Jet goes on to say with a smirk because he can see Silver's wide eyes in his peripheral vision.

"That's so cool," Silver remarks, "but what happened to them all?"

"Not sure," Jet responds thoughtfully, "but a symbol is on a lot of the ruins. It's a gold medallion with a silver bird embossed inside."

"That's neat," Silver says, trying to picture in his head what it would look like.

"Yeah, the technology is run on solar energy. So it's completely sustainable," Jet goes on to explain as he side-eyes Silver's board.

"Oh, like a battery that never dies," Silver states.

"Yep. A never depleting energy source," Jet replies as he stretches his arms and pulls himself up to a sitting position. He glances back at Silver and says, "I know this is probably a not-so-cool thing to say, but... can we keep our friendship a secret?"

Silver feels himself relax after he hears that, "You have no idea how relieved I am to hear that."

“What!?” Jet looks at him surprised.

“If my father found out I was hanging out with you, he’d probably murder me and then you and then like... a third of the population!” Silver shouts over-dramatically mimicking the action of guns shot in the sky, “Pew pew pew!”

Jet feels a chill go up his spine, “Your father terrifies me.”

“That’s just how he is,” Silver simply says, “My dad’s nice though.”

“Yeah, Sonic the Hedgehog,” Jet agrees, eyes glazed over in wonder as one leg hangs over the side of his board.

“He’s not that cool, you know,” Silver states, kind of giggling at him, “He’s actually a pretty big nerd. I don’t have the faintest idea why you look up to him so much.”

“Have you ever seen him in action? Zipping down buildings like the laws of physics don’t exist, boosting forward behind a sonic boom, performing unbelievable tricks! He doesn’t even need a board to do any of that,” Jet says like a total fanboy.

“Ew. Are you stalking my dad?” Silver snickers, pushing him playfully, “Weird-o.”

“What!? No!” Jet shouts angrily, “There’s news clippings and articles and video footage! I wasn’t even alive when that stuff in Station Square went down. My dad totally built a villa on the coast right after that madness happened with that big water monster thing. He got it for super cheap too.”

“Water monster thing...?” Silver asks before it hits him, “Oh yeah! The monster on the Chaos Cola ad or whatever.”

Jet shakes his head, “Yeah, but... your dad is cool now too though.”

Silver looks baffled by that, “Really?”

Jet nods his head and swings his leg back and forth, “He gave up being a hero and stopped his adventures so he could take care of you. There’s nothing cooler than that in my book.”

Silver feels an assortment of emotions creeping up on him, but he tries to push them down so they don’t surface. He glances at Jet and whispers, “And... your dad?”

Jet sighs sadly and lays back down on his board in silence.

Silver feels uncomfortable all of a sudden like maybe he shouldn’t have brought it up. He pulls his knees into his chest and looks away.

“I have a theory about what happened to the Babylonians...” Jet says quietly, “I believe their greed caused them to gravitate away from their god and their god got really angry and abandoned them in return.”

Silver scoots closer and places his hand on Jet’s shoulder, “I’m sorry...”

Jet shakes his head, “Don’t be because I don’t think I’m any different.”

Silver suddenly isn’t sure if Jet is referring his ancestors or his dad. He doesn’t really have time to question it either because he watches Jet hops back up onto his feet.

“Race ya back before all the kids get out of their after school activities,” Jet announces, bracing

himself into a ready pose.

Silver gives him a determined look and nods before pulling himself back onto his feet. He starts the countdown with Jet before they race off at the same time. They fly down the soccer field and to the playground. Jet nudges his board into Silver's teasingly and Silver snickers and does the same back. Jet pulls back and then speeds up coming up from the other side of Silver. He dashes forward and drifts in front of Silver before spinning and landing next to him again.

"Show off," Silver shouts back with a smirk.

Jet just sends him a smug look because he knows Silver's impressed. He just doesn't expect Silver to jump off of his board into him like a trust fall. Jet gasps and latches his arms around Silver, but it becomes unbalanced. They both tumble off it and land on a pile on the ground. They're stunned for a moment before Silver just bursts into hysterical laughter. Jet sees this and can't help but laugh with him. Now, they're both just laying on the ground laughing until their diaphragms ache.

There's a whistle in the distance before Sonic's voice calls out, "Wow! That was awesome!"

Jet bolts up when he sees the blue hero walking toward them and he immediately gets onto his feet and helps Silver up. He turns away and busies himself with his board.

Sonic smirks in Jet's direction, but turns to Silver instead, "You guys are friendly all of a sudden."

"Dad... What are you doing here?" Silver grumbles out with embarrassment.

"Your chauffeur was getting antsy," Sonic states with amusement, "Sorry if I was interrupting something."

"Ew," Silver shoves his dad back, "Go meet me in the car!"

"I just wanted to see what you were doin' after school," Sonic says playfully as he's slowly being pushed away, "I was hoping it was like a book club or something."

"Stop being so nosy!" Silver shouts back with a mortified look.

"Not gunna introduce me to your friend?" Sonic asks playfully.

"You already met him," Silver shoots back as he continues to push him away.

"No, you're right. My bad," Sonic says in mock apology before shouting over to the green hawk, "Hey, Jet! Long time no see! Sweet tricks, bro!"

Silver cringes at his dad's words and goes to hide his face. He doesn't even want to know what Jet's reaction is.

"Th-thanks..." Jet says a bit shyly, still not looking at Sonic.

Sonic bypasses Silver while he's distracted with his little meltdown. Sonic kneels in front of Jet and rests his arms on his knees, "Got a little sidetracked, huh?"

Jet looks away. He knows what Sonic is referring to. He was supposed to look out for Silver in preschool and he didn't. In fact, he made it worse.

"That's okay," Sonic says a bit sympathetically, "It can be hard to express your true feelings in front of a lot of people. Especially when those people are always looking at you."

Jet gives him a quizzical look.

Sonic pulls Jet closer and whispers to him, “Wanna know the secret to being *really* cool?”

Jet’s eyes sparkle a little and he nods to him.

“The secret to being really cool is to embrace the things *you* love. Not what everyone else does,” Sonic finishes with a smirk.

Jet blinks at him.

Sonic sends him a little wink before pulling himself back up to his feet and walks back to Silver.

Silver grabs his dad’s hand and starts pulling him over to the parking lot, “Come on, dad! Jet doesn’t care about your dumb words of wisdom! Go post a TED talk or something!”

Sonic just laughs out loud at that and ruffles Silver’s quills, “I’m coming. I’m coming.” As they walk away, Sonic sends one last wave to Jet and calls out to him, “Thanks for taking care of Silver! I appreciate it!”

Jet stands where he is and watches them go. Sonic’s words really resonate with him. He never really considered what *he* liked. He was always so worried about what everyone else thought. He frowns a little bit of shame. He gets on his board and looks down at his feet.

Could he do that though? He wonders if that's even an option. He’s been wearing this invisible armor for so long that it feels safe. The thought of being himself was really scary.

Silver grips his head when he gets into the car and lets out an irritated groan, “You weren’t supposed to see that!”

“Aw,” Sonic coos out like it’s cute, “Why not? I’m not gunna judge.”

Silver tugs on his dad’s sleeve and glares up at him, “No, because I *promised* we were going to keep our friendship a secret!”

“Pffft! I’m not gunna tell anyone,” Sonic responds with a shrug.

“That’s not the point,” Silver kicks his feet out and folds his arms across his chest with a scowl.

Sonic stares at Silver for a long moment in silence before looking away solemnly.

Silver does notice that and he raises an eyebrow at him, “Dad?”

Sonic shakes his head and lets out a sigh. He looks a little tired, but he ruffles Silver’s quills before announcing, “Nothing, kiddo. Let’s get home.” Sonic usually doesn’t go straight for the oldies station, but he does today and there’s a slight glassiness to his eyes all of a sudden.

Silver slowly unfolds his arms and isn’t sure what to make of it, but he knows better than to question it. He recognizes one of the songs on the radio from his father’s record collection and hums along to it.

His face falls little-by-little and he can feel the tears welling up in his eyes too now.

He had to be coming home soon, right?

## Playing Hooky



### Chapter Fifteen: Playing Hooky

“Calling all troops! Calling all troops! There’s been an attack on the prison walls! I repeat, there’s been an attack on the prison walls! All soldiers in the direct area must come to the gates immediately! There are men down and—Ack!”

Zero is perched on one of the branches from above and listening to Shadow’s radio signal, “Yeah, yeah... What else is new?”

Shadow doesn’t like how nonchalant Zero is to their men dying, but he doesn’t really have the time to argue. Even if he did, his mental fatigue wouldn’t allow it. It’s even scaring himself how desensitized by all of this he’s getting.

“That’s us, Zero,” Shadow states as he waves for him to follow.

“Of course it is,” Zero rolls his eyes and pulls himself onto his feet.

“Stick with the high ground. Give me visuals as soon as you can,” Shadow directs him as they jet off.

Omega follows Shadow, blasting holes in the vegetation to move through easier. Zero stays on the branches, hopping from one to the other skillfully. It doesn’t take long for Zero to spot it.

“About six or seven,” Zero informs Shadow as he jumps nimbly through a bundle branches and lands onto a fallen tree, skidding down to the ground next to the two and continuing to run side-by-



side them, "Planting explosives on the East wall."

Shadow nods to him in understanding, "Very good, Zero."

"Permission to blast perpetrators away?" Omega asks.

"No," Shadow responds, "We need minimal damage to that wall. If they break through its game over. Zero and I will go ahead and detain them. If they do manage to get through that wall do what you will, Omega. Don't hold back."

"Understood," Omega confirms before adding, "Also hoping they break through."

Zero snickers a little before murmuring to Shadow, "I think he's growing on me."

"It usually takes others awhile to warm up to Omega," Shadow replies before shooting him a slight grin when he hears Zero finally refer to Omega as *he*, "It's nice to see you consider him a teammate though."

"He has my respects, Shadow. It is not likely I would be sending him Christmas cards every year," Zero responds in a snarky tone.

Shadow just rolls his eyes and points ahead of them, "Take cover and wait for my signal. We'll initiate a surprise attack."

"Oh, my favorite," Zero says with a hungry gleam to his eye.

They dart off in different directions, but not far enough to be out of eyesight. The jackals seem to be preoccupied with other GUN soldiers and drones. It's a losing fight on their end though.

Once Shadow sees an opening, all he has to do his motion his head forward and Zero gets the hint. They burst out of the brush and attack.

Shadow sends one kick after another, dodging blades and the like. Shadow sees one of the soldiers go down and he snaps his leg up, kicking a sword out of one of the jackal's hands. The blade spins in the air and he smacks his heel at the pommel sending it down like a dart, "Incoming, Zero."

Zero sees it and dodge rolls out of the way before seeing the blade impale the jackals throat to the wall. He turns back to Shadow with a smirk, "Nice one. I am more and more impressed by your growing creativity in kills."

"On your right," Shadow shouts to him before throwing another jackal over his own shoulder, "Focus now. Talk later."

Zero sees the blade and shifts away last minute as it clangs against his own blade. His eyes meet the other's and he feels his arms shaking under the pressure.

The jackal just laugh at Zero, "Your victories are not your own, Zero. You hide behind living sacks of flesh and send out cheap strikes when you can. You are pathetic."

Zero growls and feels the weight of the others blade getting lighter in his rage.

Even so, it leaves him open and Zero falls onto his back. He gasps when he sees the blade coming down on him and he rolls away as it strikes the ground. He attempts to get back on his feet, but the blade crashes down on him again and he has just enough time to block it. The vibrations of their blade throws his own blade back though and he's on his back once more.

The jackal smiles in a victorious manner as they drag their sword against the ground as they march over to Zero, “That is how your mother died, is it not? She threw herself in front of a blade for a sorry excuse of a son. That is how it is though. When you do not kick the defects out, you yourself get purged. It is the balance of nature.”

“How is this for a balance of nature,” Shadow states darkly before grabbing the jackal’s head and snapping it so hard it breaks their neck. He drops the body on the ground and looks around at the damage. It’s heavy, but the wall is still intact. That’s all that mattered.

He could have detained that last one, but did it even matter at this point? That one was for Zero.

“They are right,” Zero snarls as he slowly pulls himself back to his feet.

“No, they aren’t,” Shadow murmurs back, “If life relied on that backwards logic there would be nothing living to this day.”

“You would lie to me?” Zero asks in appall.

“To you? No, I know that would be counterproductive with you.” Shadow responds with a look of indifference, “The generations before need to look out for and nurture the generations that come after to ensure a better future.”

Zero just stands still, frantically searching Shadow’s eyes in a desperate attempt to figure out if he’s telling the truth. When all he sees is the indisputable certainty, his shoulders sag in defeat.

Shadow turns back to Omega and orders, “Radio HQ. Inform them that the situation has been resolved and to request repairs. Nothing goes in or out of these walls. We’ll stand guard for the time being.”

“Affirmative,” Omega replies as his systems whirl to life.

Zero makes his way up to Shadow and side glances him, “So, is that your excuse for me?”

“For you?” Shadow questions.

Zero just lets out a bitter laugh, “A liability for the future.”

Shadow takes a moment to figure out what Zero is implying. He sighs and folds his arms across his chest, “If you must know what you are... You are the only reason why we’ve held out as long as we have. You’re entitled to call my words lies, but without your intel GUN would have retreated without a second thought and the doctor would have been released to plot his next move.” Shadow walks past him, leaving the conversation in finality.

Zero just watches him. He furrows his brow and shouts back at him in anger, “What is it you want from me!?”

Shadow stops and glances over his shoulder, “Your trust.”

Zero takes a step back like this is the one thing that scares him about Shadow, “Why?”

“To prove to you that the world is built from bonds, not one singular source,” Shadow responds sternly.

Zero looks away. It couldn’t be that easy. Nothing has been that easy. No one has ever wanted his trust without taking advantage of him. He was never able to rely on anyone, but himself. Yet here is

Shadow, wanting the one thing he promised himself he'd never give anyone.

Because life was full of disappointments.

-

Sonic's legs hang over the side of the bed as he looks down at his phone. It's morning and the sun hasn't come up yet, but he keeps having these weird instances where he thinks he's hearing his phone go off. It hasn't and he's constantly checking it, but no missed calls ever seem to appear.

He glances down at Silver who is still sleeping. He can tell the poor kid has been having nightmares and he hopes it doesn't have anything to do with all of this.

Sonic makes sure Silver is tucked in before leaving the room and shutting the door lightly behind him. He carefully makes his way downstairs and starts up a pot of coffee. His ears perk up when he hears a piece of metal clang inside the garage and he rushes over to open it. He frowns when he sees Shadow's bike is still missing.

He *does* see two stowaway squirrels rummaging around in Shadow's tool set though. Sonic rolls his eyes and makes his way over to the garage door and pulls it open. "As much as I appreciate you guys stopping by, you can't live here. I mean, if you started paying rent that'd be one thing, but..." Sonic tells them as he tries to shoo them out. He watches them go and remembers Silver's comment about squirrels scavenging nuts and he feels kind of dumb for talking to random animals now. The things probably couldn't even understand a word he's saying.

Still, he doesn't like talking down to anything in case that isn't the case.

He closes the garage door and makes his way back inside. He pours himself a cup of coffee even though the pot isn't finished. He knows Shadow hates when he does it because a few drops always drip on the hotplate and it makes it harder to clean, but he doesn't really care today. He knows it's too early to call anyone right now and his only real friend at this hour is his cup of coffee.

Sonic hates waking up this early. He scrolls through his contacts and scrunches his face when the cursor falls on Tails' name. He wonders if he's up. Sometimes he is and sometimes he isn't. Sonic doesn't mull over it too long and figures he'd shoot a text instead of outright calling. That way if he is really sleeping, he can totally ignore it.

To Sonic's surprise, he gets a response right away. He's happy it isn't tired gibberish either. He sends one more text asking if it's cool to call him and immediately his phone shows Tails' name across it calling him. Sonic smiles softly because he loves his bro so much sometimes.

Sonic makes his way out the front door and sits on the steps of the porch before answering it like a stale phone operator, "You've reached the resistance of a sad, lonely insomniac. No one is available to take your call. Please, leave a message after the beep. Beeeep."

Tails giggles from the other side of the receiver, "Shut up, Sonic. I know that's you. You just texted me."

"What were you working on this time?" Sonic asks with a smirk because he knows there's no other reason he'd be up right now.

"It's complicated," Tails says a little dismissively, "I'm taking a break anyway."

"Taking a break?" Sonic pulls his phone away to look at the time, "It's like... 5am, dude."

Tails snorts, "It's not like I have any commissions I'm working on right now. Also you're Silver's dad, not mine."

"Oh, excuse me for being concerned about my bro's sleep schedule," Sonic says with a pout as he rests his cup of coffee on the step next to him. The thing is still too hot to drink.

"I'm more worried about yours. Isn't it a little early for the infamous Sonic the Hedgehog to be awake right now," Tails points out in a smug tone.

Sonic presses his head against the railing of the porch and notices how long the grass is getting. If Shadow doesn't come home soon, he's going to have to ask someone how to use a lawnmower. He frowns at that thought and feels his heart sinking in his chest, "I can't sleep."

"Wanna talk about it?" Tails asks patiently because he knows Sonic isn't joking this time around.

"Kind of...? I also don't want to," Sonic responds with a quiet laugh.

"Is it about Shadow?" Tails says carefully like he doesn't want to pry too hard.

Sonic feels the emotions coming in harder now. He blinks his eyes to stop himself from outright crying. He feels like a wreck and that Shadow being gone shouldn't mess him up this bad. "I think so," Sonic says, even though he knows full well that's the reason, "It's been like five days since he called last. He said it was only supposed to be a week or two and..."

"Yeah," Tails replies like he understands where he's coming from.

"I feel really dumb for being emotional like this. Like, what's wrong with me? It isn't that big of a deal," Sonic tries to reason out loud with himself. He buries his face into his hand and winces when he admits, "I almost started crying in the car with Silver yesterday... I don't even know what happened. We were just goofing off and the kid just did this...*thing*, and all I saw was Shadow looking back at me."

"You miss him, Sonic," Tails explains, "It's normal."

Sonic swallows thickly as the memory hits him like a wave and he scrubs the tears away from his eyes with embarrassment. "Me?" Sonic asks with a laugh, but it's thick with tears, "I used to go weeks without seeing *anyone*. I used to go on adventures and travel the world. Just me and the wind."

"It isn't just you anymore," Tails says softly, "It's you, Silver, and Shadow now. You've gotten used to that life. It's okay to be sad."

"I just feel like an idiot," Sonic grumbles as he pulls his legs up to his chest, "Every time I talk to Shadow he's so calm and stuff. He's probably not taking it this hard."

Tails hums out a thoughtful noise before saying, "I'd bargain his mind is preoccupied with other things. He probably hasn't really had a minute for all of this to set in yet."

Sonic is quiet for a moment. He reaches over to his cup and blows on it before taking a sip. He glances up at the sky because he notices the break of light along the horizon. He wonders if Shadow's watching the sunrise today. "Maybe you can hack into GUN's database and tell me what's goin' on out there," Sonic suggests lightly.

"We talked about this..." Tails says with a frown to his voice, "I can't keep hacking the mainframe every time something like this happens. Just try to trust that he's taking care of it for now. If things

get really bad I'll be on it like a heart attack, but we shouldn't worry about these things prematurely."

Sonic lets out a displeased noise. He's upset he's acted so rashly in the past before. He's had Tails hack into the server multiple times and all have been false alarms. It was just his paranoia throwing him off the rails. This feels different. Shadow's never been gone this long but Sonic feels like he's called wolf so many times that no one would believe him at this point.

"Can me and Silver come over today?" Sonic asks instead.

"Now, that I can do," Tails says with a smile to his voice, "Although you've never had to ask before."

Sonic finds himself laughing at that, "Cool, I'll see you in a few hours."

"Sounds goo--," Tails stops when he hears that and asks suddenly, "Wait! Doesn't Silver have school today--?!"

Sonic had already ended the call though. He chuckles to himself and sits back. He wants to enjoy the sunrise now. It's light washes over the houses around them and warms his skin. He closes his eyes and can almost feel Shadow sitting with him.

-

Silver shifts in bed a little. It feels really bright for being morning as the sunlight glares through the blinds. He feels around the large bed and opens his eyes when he doesn't feel his dad anywhere. Silver blinks a little and pulls the thick comforter off him. He glances at the analogue clock and nearly has a heart attack when he sees what time it is.

It's ten o'clock!

Silver panics and quickly changes his clothes. He's pulling on a t-shirt as he rushes down the stairs, "Daaaad! Daaaad!? Where are you!? We're late---!" Silver gasps when he trips over his feet and flies forward.

Sonic is already at the bottom of the stairs and scooping the falling hedgehog into his arms, "Good morning, Silver!"

"No, not good morning!" Silver shakes his head and shouts with alarm, "I'm late! I'm late!"

"No, you're not," Sonic snickers and places the panicked hedgehog back on his feet, "I called you off today. We're gunna go see uncle Tails."

Silver gives him a look of confusion, "Dad, you're only supposed to call me off when I'm sick. You can't just call me off whenever. What if I actually *am* sick one day!"

Sonic shrugs at him, "Then, I call you off again. Stop worrying." Sonic takes Silver's hand and guides him over to the kitchen, announcing, "I bought breakfast sandwiches and hash browns today! We're both takin' a sick day."

"You have to actually *work* to have a sick day," Silver points out with a huff.

"Making breakfast in the morning everyday *is* work, Silvy," Sonic retaliates with a smug look.

Silver just sighs because he's got him there. He sees the fast food bag and takes it, fishing out a wrapped sandwich that smells like a delicious combination of bacon, eggs, and cheese. He unwraps

a portion and takes a small bite, humming happily at the taste. He watches his dad do the same, except the whole thing is unwrapped and crumbs are falling on the tablecloth. If father were here, he'd be yelling at him to grab a plate.

Silver swallows his bite and asks, "How am I supposed to get my homework?"

Sonic sends him a smirk and says, "Oh, don't worry about that."

Silver just raises an eyebrow at him and shakes his head. He knows not to question him at this point. He won't admit it, but there is something kind of cool about staying home like this.

As they get to Tails' workshop, Sonic barges in like he owns the place.

Tails gives Sonic a look of disappointed look, "You *do* realize if the school board finds out you're having Silver play hooky you could get in big trouble."

Sonic is rummaging around the cupboards for a few glasses and pours some orange juice into them. He hands one to Silver even though he never really asked for one and helps the kid up onto one of the stools in front of the counter. Sonic sits beside his son and asks, "You gunna tell them?"

Tails looks uncomfortable before answering, "No, of course not."

"Awesome. Crisis averted," Sonic snickers as he clinks his glass against Silver's and takes a big gulp.

Silver just gives his dad an exasperated look before taking the large glass with both hands and guiding it up to his mouth to drink.

"Silver deserves a break," Sonic states after finishing off the glass and wiping his mouth, "He's been through heck and back with that teacher. The kid needs it."

Silver looks down and blushes. That was actually a really nice thing for Sonic to say. Maybe he was right about this.

"Or..." Tails says like he can see right through him, "You're lonely and you called him in because of your own selfish reasons."

Silver face palms himself because that sounds more likely.

"What!?" Sonic squeaks out like that could never be the case, "I just... He... *No!*" Tails is giving him *the look* though. The one where he knows he's right and it drives Sonic crazy every time he sees it. Sonic throws his hands up in defeat and confesses, "Fine, that's *totally* what I did! Can you blame me for wanting to spend more time with my kid? He's at the place five days a week!"

"Go get a job then," Tails suggests already knowing what the answer is.

"Nope," Sonic shakes his head stubbornly, "I made a promise to Silvy. I'd always be there for him. What if he needs to be picked up in the middle of the day? I wanna be there."

Silver smiles at his dad softly and remembers Jet's words about how Sonic gave up on being a hero to take care of him. He places his hand on Sonic's and says, "Thank you, dad. That means a lot."

Sonic looks down at Silver like he's shocked to hear that and a big smile widens on his face. He tries not to tear up as he pulls Silver into a tight hug, "Of course, kiddo."

Tails finds it kind of sweet. He watches Sonic place Silver back down and tells him to grab his board

for Tails to look at. As Silver goes to grab his backpack at the door, Tails says quietly, “You and Silver have gotten closer because of all of this.”

Sonic looks away sheepishly and rubs the back of his neck, “Whaddya mean? We’ve always been close.”

Tails nods to him, “I know.” They both know what he means though.

“He’s starting to act like a kid again,” Sonic informs him with a smile.

Tails shrugs his shoulders, “Maybe he feels like he can now.”

Sonic just nods back with a sad smile. He takes in a breath and composes himself before Silver returns with his board in hand. Sonic gives him a thumbs up and motions toward Tails, “Think you can help Silver give his new ride a paint job?”

Silver’s eyes widen in awe and gives Tails a look of disbelief, “You can do that!?”

Tails laughs out loud at that, “Of course. That’s my specialty!” He gets up and takes Silver’s board one arm and Silver’s hand in the other. He turns back to Sonic and asks, “You gunna stay in here for a bit.”

Sonic just nods to him, his smile breaking a little bit.

Tails nods in understanding. He directs his attention back to Silver and says, “Come on, little buddy. I’m thinking either a silver or gold. I’ll show you the different colors I have.”

As Sonic watches the two disappear into the workshop, he suddenly feels the emotions he’s been trying to hold back for the sake of Silver’s wellbeing resurface. It’s a suffocating weight that crashes down on him all at once. He makes his way back into his old bedroom and the nostalgia of it doesn’t do him any favors either. He remembers when the three of them slept here when they had first gotten Silver. Sonic grits his teeth as the tears begin to spill down his cheeks. All he can manage to do it bury his face into his pillow and cry.

Silver’s board looks amazing. It’s a silver base coat with gold hexagonal shapes traveling down the sides. Silver can’t even believe it. It doesn’t look anything like the old board. It looks just as cool and real as Jet’s. He can’t wait to show him at recess tomorrow.

“That should do it,” Tails states as he wipes his brow, “Oh, wait...”

“What is it?” Silver asks with a frown, “It looks great!”

“It does now,” Tails tells him, “but if I don’t put a top coat on this, the paint will chip the moment it hits any surface.”

Silver frowns. He almost doesn’t want to touch it anymore.

“Don’t worry. That’s what the top coat is for,” Tails informs him, “It’ll protect it. Think you can grab it for me? It’s on my workbench inside.”

Silver nods to his uncle and rushes back into the home. He spots the workbench and smiles when he sees the can of paint on it. He makes his way over to and grabs it. He’s about to run back to the workshop when he hears something.

Silver quietly pads over to the hallway in back and listens carefully. It sounds like soft, hiccupping

breaths. It kind of sounds like his dad's laugh, but different. "Dad...?" Silver murmurs quietly before peering into the door that's partially closed. His eyes widen by what he sees.

Sonic's back is facing the door, but he's huddled in on himself as he takes in deep, hitched breaths as he sobs. His fingers are gripping his head like he's in pain and his shoulders keep shaking.

Silver takes one step into the room, but backs off when he hears the sobs getting louder. His brow furrows in confusion because he's never heard his dad cry this hard before. Over anything. It causes his bones to freeze as a wave of sorrow crashes over him.

Silver jolts when he hears his dad's crying become that of anguish as he chokes on his sobs and huddles in on himself closer.

He misses father. He can tell. There's no other reason in his mind. Silver just wishes he'd seen how bad he was hurting. He slowly backs up unnoticed and feels a pit of anger in his chest as he grips the paint can in his hands. How could father do this to him? How could he do this to them? He's suddenly really mad at him. Shadow told him about mistakes and how he needed to be careful because his actions hurt others, but what about Sonic? He was hurting him right now.

Silver sniffs and scrubs the tears forming in his eyes away roughly and stomps back out to the workshop. He places the paint can on the ground next to Tails and sits down as he looks away. He suddenly doesn't much care about this.

The next time he talks to father, he's going to give him a piece of his mind. This wasn't right.

Once the board is fully finished, Tails tells him it'll need a day to dry and that he can pick it up tomorrow. Silver would have been upset about this revelation if he wasn't so upset about other matters. Tails figures his attitude change is because of that news, but Silver doesn't say one way or another.

"Hey, I know," Tails says, playing up his excitement for the kid as he pulls out a laptop from his work station. He opens up a few files before spinning it around and showing Silver, "Check it out. They're shoe designs for you. Sonic and I designed them together when you were a little baby."

Silver's eyes do get big when he sees what's on the screen. They're really cool boots with his inhibitors attached to them. He scoots closer and he notices the little signature pen strokes he's memorized from his dad's work. Sonic definitely had a part in this. The style says it all.

Tails smiles when he sees that it brightens up Silver's mood, "If you ask your parents nicely, I'm sure I can start preparations on them. They might come in handy now that you're learning your way around a board."

Silver stops when he hears that. Parents as in plural. He wouldn't get these until his father got back. Whenever that'll be. He does smile in appreciation though because his uncle was kind enough to offer.

They both glance up when the door to the workshop opens. Sonic walks inside and doesn't make eye contact with Silver. He just makes a b-line behind him and wraps his arms around the small hedgehog, looking at the screen of the laptop. "Aw man! You're showing Silver the shoes!" Sonic says with eagerness.

Silver didn't get a good look at his dad's face, but he can hear the thickness of his voice that's still irritated by his crying. Silver leans in against Sonic's chest in a comforting manner and he feels Sonic's arms tighten around him.



“Yep. I was just telling Silver that after you talk it over with Shadow, I can begin work on them,” Tails explains happily, “Might be good to have some ankle support for all the riding he’s doing.”

“That sounds like an stellar idea! Now seems like as good of a time as ever,” Sonic responds with a smile, “I’d probably feel better with him riding at night with those reflectors too.”

Tails just nods his head back in agreement.

“I was thinkin’ about heading over to Angel Island and giving Knux and Rouge a visit. Wanna come with?” Sonic asks.

Tails strains a smile and rubs the back of his neck, “If it’s all the same to you, I think I’m gunna get a few winks of sleep. I’ve... kind of been up all night.”

Sonic gives him a smug look, “So, I *should* be worrying about my little bro’s sleep schedule?”

Tails sighs and gets to his feet, “If I would have know you were coming today I wouldn’t have pulled an all-nighter.”

“I guess I’ll let you off the hook this time,” Sonic snickers and stands up, helping Silver up as he does so.

Tails just rolls his eyes, “Whatever.” He rests his hands on his hips and adds, “My door is always open, okay? Even when I’m sleeping.”

“Thanks,” Sonic says with a bright smile as he holds his fist out.

Tails bumps their fists together, “Take care. Oh, and tell Knuckles to chill for me.”

Sonic shakes his head and gives him a thumbs up before guiding them out of the workshop. Silver waves good-bye as he holds Sonic’s hand. He sneaks a peek up at his dad’s eyes and sees that they’re still a little red. He frowns, but doesn’t say anything about it. He just holds his hand tighter and wishes he could tell him that it’ll be okay.

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Knuckles and Rouge’s place is a humble home on Angel Island. Ever since the Master Emerald was “put into storage”—as Sonic likes to call it—the island has rested comfortably against one of the cliffs near where Mystic Ruins and Red Mountain meet.

When Sonic knocks on the door, Rouge is the one to answer. She’s giving Sonic an amused look before stepping aside to let him in, “My brother-in-law, but no brother. Shadow’s been suspiciously quiet lately.”

Sonic just shrugs to her even though he knows why that is, “You know him. He just does this sometimes.”

“Rouge! Why are you moving around!? I set the pillows down for you! I would have gotten the door!” Knuckles shouts frazzled as he fusses over his wife. She tries to swat him away, but Knuckles picks her up with one hand and brings her back over to the couch.

She gives him a tired look before she’s placed back down on the couch comfortably, “Hon, I’m having a *baby*, I’m not dying.”

Sonic is trying not to laugh. So, this is what Tails meant about telling Knuckles to chill out. He’s

about as protective over Rouge right now as he had been the Master Emerald.

Rouge crosses her legs over one another and lounges back a bit tiredly. Not from physical exhaustion, but mental. She is sporting her three month baby bump under a loose t-shirt. "As you can see, we're over prepared for all of this," Rouge whispers to Sonic as she motions her hand at all of the already baby proofed home, "I can't even plug my laptop in without Knuckles rushing to put a light socket cover on it."

"Knucklehead, my buddy, my pal," Sonic addresses his friend, "Wise words from my little bro: *Chill.*"

"Is that all you can say to your best friend," Knuckles responds with appall.

"Best friend?" Sonic snorts, "Who appointed you my BFF?"

"Me," Knuckles states with confidence, "I thought it was obvious. Who else is there? Tails is your brother, Shadow is your husband, Amy is..."

"Amy is Amy," Sonic finishes before he can even say another word, "...Or my current fix dealer. You pick."

"Well, no one else fits the bill," Knuckles points out smugly.

Sonic lifts his fist in the air in a half-assed woot, "Congrats. You're my best friend by default. What an accomplishment."

Knuckles stands up with his chest out radiating with pride.

Silver leans over to his dad and whispers, "What's wrong with him?"

"He's not the sharpest tool in the shed," Sonic whispers back with a snicker.

Rouge hones in on Silver when she hears his little voice. She gives him a wave and a smirk, "Hello, Silver. You get more and more handsome every time I see you."

Silver looks away with a huff and blushes.

She just laughs at his response because it reminds her of Shadow, "You're going to be a little heartbreaker when you get older."

"I dunno? Seems like he's had his sights set on this one for awhile now," Sonic teases.

"Daaad!" Silver shouts with embarrassment as he pushes Sonic, "It's not like that!"

Rouge looks intrigued by Silver's reaction and leans forward to ask, "Do they drive you absolutely crazy?"

Silver folds his arms across his chest and refuses to look at Rouge.

"Oh yeah," Rouge nods in understanding, "They're a keeper."

Knuckles just puffs out a short laugh, "Luckily, you have it easy with me. I'd never drive you crazy."

Rouge rolls her eyes while he's not looking and smirks when he sees Sonic shaking his head.

“So besides the obvious,” Sonic says bypassing Knuckles’ comment, “How’s everything been?”

“I can’t complain,” Rouge shrugs a little, “I’m bored out of my skull most days, but I can finally sit back and relax for once. I’d never do this as a full-time gig, but it’s a nice vacation.”

“That’s right,” Knuckles chimes in right after, “Once little Ruby is born, I’ll be full-time guardian of her.”

Rouge rubs the bridge of her nose before grumbling, “Hon, we agreed we were going to go through a list of baby names before we decided indefinitely on one.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Knuckles states dismissively, “but so far Ruby is the best one. It’s a placeholder until we find a better name.”

Rouge leans forward again and whispers to Sonic, “He came up with it. There’s no changing his mind.”

“Hey, Knux. Wanna let your wife get a little bit of a say in this? She *is* having your kid after all,” Sonic says in a snarky tone.

“*Our* kid,” Knuckles states proudly as if he’s completely missed the point, “And little Ruby will be the next in line of the Era Two Echidna Tribe.” Sonic can practically see the trademark hovering over those words.

Rouge just sits back again and signals for Sonic to not bother. There was no reasoning with Knuckles when he gets like this.

“So, where’s Shadow?” Knuckles asks like it’s the next line of business, “I haven’t called him a jerk in months.”

Sonic kind of freaks out when he hears that and pulls out his phone to check the date. He breathes a sigh of relief when he notices that it hasn’t been months since he was gone. It’s going on a month, but not months. It definitely feels longer though.

“What’s wrong, big blue?” Rouge asks with mild concern, “You seem like you’re on edge.”

“Me? On edge? No way,” Sonic responds, trying to sound indifferent about it.

Silver frowns when he sees his dad covering for his father. That makes him angry. Shadow didn’t deserve it. He left them and made Sonic cry. He wouldn’t stand for that. He exchanges firm eye contact with Rouge and states, “Father hasn’t been home in weeks.”

“Silver!” Sonic shouts in panic, pressing his hand against the small hedgehog’s mouth.

Silver pries his dad’s hand away from his mouth and he pulls himself off the couch. He glares at Sonic with anger and asks, “Why are you covering for him!?” Silver hates how he can feel the tears pricking at his eyes as he remembers Sonic’s crying form, shaking and upset.

Rouge looks between the two in confusion, “Is he on a mission?”

“Yeah,” Sonic nods to her, “but it’s not a big deal. It’s just for convenience. Ya know, easier than traveling back and forth to Prison Island all the time.”

Rouge nods back like he knows, “That place is such a pain. It’s nice to have the extra added defense, but traveling there is exhausting.”

"I bet. I'm exhausted just thinking about it," Sonic replies jokingly.

"You? Exhausted? That'll be the day," Knuckles responds with the shake of his head.

Sonic places a hand on Silver's shoulder and asks, "Hey, why don't you go with Knux and get something to drink. All that work with Tails has probably made you thirsty."

Silver looks a little crushed. Sonic's never dismissed him like this before. He wanted everyone to know what was happening. He wanted his dad to be more open about how he felt. He wanted everyone to know what Shadow had done to them. Silver just sniffs, but doesn't have it in him to argue.

Sonic guides him Knuckles' way and Knuckles guides him into the kitchen.

It's quiet in the room before Rouge asks, "Should I be worried?"

"No! No..." Sonic shakes his head, "No, I'm pretty sure everything is fine. Shadow doesn't want you to worry and like... rightfully so. You're gunna have a kid. If anything were to happen, me and my bro would be on it like *that*." Sonic snaps his fingers and gives her a confident smile, "Everything is fine. I promise."

Rouge gives him a soft smile and she leans forward to take his hands in hers, "Thank you, big blue. I'm so glad Shadow has someone like you looking out for him."

Sonic nods back. He feels his chest swell with emotions. Mostly guilt for having had lied to her so well. He didn't feel like he was in as much control of this situation as he's making himself out to, but the last thing he wants is for her to do anything rash right now.

"Of course, Rouge," Sonic says, giving her hands a reassuring squeeze, "No one's getting to Shadow without goin' through me first." He sure hopes that's true too. He won't let that be a lie.

Rouge seems pleased by this and she relaxes back against the couch, "Well, since he's not talking to me, tell him that he needs to rescue me from a crazy echidna so I can go out for once."

"I'll definitely relay the message," Sonic responds, laughing at the implications of Rouge's words.

Knuckles and Silver return shortly after. Silver sits quietly on the couch next to Sonic, but doesn't look at him. Instead, he blows bubbles in his juice and pops them with the straw. Wishing each one was his father's big, dumb face.

Sonic feels bad, but knows not to bother him right now.

After a few hours of conversing and catching up...and also trying to convince Knuckles that the thermostat going any colder than 70 degrees won't affect the baby...they finally say their good-byes.

Silver notices that Sonic is really antsy about getting back home before 3 o'clock for some reason. He isn't sure why since they literally took the whole day off.

When they get back, Sonic is looking out the front room window like a guard dog awaiting the paperman. Silver just sighs and doesn't bother asking what he's doing. Although he does want to know why he was covering for Shadow. "Why didn't you tell Aunt Rouge about father being gone?"

Sonic looks back at Silver and rubs the back of his neck like he's trying to figure out what to say. "Well... You know how Shadow works for the military?" Sonic winces when he says it.

Silver nods once to him.

“Rouge does too. She works *with* Shad-Dad, but she’s taking a break right now because she’s having a baby,” Sonic explains.

Silver just eyes him like he doesn’t understand how any of that is connected.

Sonic frowns when he sees the confusion written on Silver’s face and he motions for Silver to come to him. When the small hedgehog climbs into his lap, Sonic wraps his arms around him securely. “I know that knucklehead is going overboard when it comes to protecting her, but... he kinda has the right idea. The kind of work Shadow does could be dangerous and if Rouge thinks something’s wrong she might feel obligated to go back to work. See where I’m goin’ with this?”

Silver rethinks Sonic’s words before slowly nodding his head. He didn’t want anything to happen to his unborn cousin. That would be really sad and scary. He hugs his dad and rests his head against his chest before saying, “I don’t like that father has made you sad.”

Sonic has a somber look as his eyes remain focused out the window, “That’s life, Silver. There’s gunna be sad moments and happy moments.” A small smile appears on his face before continuing, “If everything was happy all of the time, those little moments wouldn’t feel as special anymore. We need to feel sad sometimes so we can really appreciate what we have.”

Silver presses his face closer to his dad’s chest and lets out a small sob, “It feels like the sad moments last for so long.”

“I know...” Sonic murmurs as he runs his hand down Silver’s quills, “They don’t last forever though.”

“What if they do,” Silver replies angrily.

Sonic just laughs lightly at that, “Then, we fix that. We hold onto hope and take action.”

Silver furrows his brows and looks up at his dad. That was actually really insightful. He feels a little better after knowing that.

Silver hears his dad gasp loudly and rushes the kid over to the stairs, “Go to your room and pretend to be sick, okay?”

Silver raises an eyebrow at him, “What?”

The doorbell suddenly rings and Sonic pushes him up the steps, “C’mon, Silvy! Hurry!”

“Alright, alright...” Silver says with a little pout as he makes his way up to his room.

Sonic zips back over to the front door and fixes his quills before slowly opening it. He smirks down at their visitor as he leans against the doorframe, “Hello, Jet. What brings you here?”

The green hawk looks embarrassed before huffing and holding up a few notebooks and papers, “I was forced to bring Silver his homework.”

“Aw! How *very* sweet of you,” Sonic says over-enthusiastically, but doesn’t take what’s offered to him. Instead, he opens the door wider and gestures inside, “Silver’s upstairs if you wanna drop those off.”

Jet looks a little horrified like he really, really doesn’t want to do that. He can’t exactly say no to

Sonic though. He visibly swallows and takes a step inside the house. He looks around and honestly expected the home of *Sonic the Hedgehog* to be a little bigger than just this. This was relatively modest compared to what he would have envisioned.

Sonic shuts the front door and slowly saunters up to the staircase before shouting, “Silver! Your little friend, Jet, is here to bring you your homework.”

There’s a crash heard from upstairs and Sonic humorously wonders what the heck Silver knocked over on his mad dash to the bed. “I’m contagious! Don’t let him up here!” Silver shouts in a distressed tone.

“Nonsense,” Sonic says back as he motions for Jet to walk up the stairs.

Jet looks back at Sonic as if to ask if it’s okay, but only gets a smug look in reply. He sighs and makes his way up the stairs. A neat clutter of pictures litter the walls. They vary from Sonic, Shadow, and Silver. Silver being different ages. Although his knees quake when his eyes stop on a very intimidating picture of Shadow at the top and he really doesn’t want to be here right now. The dark hedgehog in the picture is practically piercing his soul with that gaze.

Jet finally makes it to the top step and he sees a little plaque on the bedroom at the end of the hall that reads Silver’s name. He takes a deep breath before walking down it and he gently pushes the door open.

Silver’s eyes are poking out of the blanket that is pulled up to his face. He’s so embarrassed. Why did his dad have to do this to him!? He looks away timidly and mumbles a quiet, “Hi.”

“Hey,” Jet mumbles back, just as awkward. He walks inside and sees the small chair at the side of his bed. He walks over to it before taking a seat. He carefully places the notebooks and papers down on the nightstand. “I uh... brought the homework you missed and the notes I took today. You can like copy them or whatever, but you have to give them back to me when you’re done,” Jet says a bit stubbornly.

Silver chances a glance at Jet and sees that he’s looking at him. His eyes veer over to the papers and he feels a little bad. “You didn’t have to...” Silver mumbles back.

“And fight the Tidal Tempest? No way,” Jet responds with a bitter laugh, “Only *you* are dumb enough to do that.”

Silver frowns at that and sinks in lower to his mattress, “Well... Thank you.”

They’re silent for a moment. Jet takes a second to look around his room. Again, it’s pretty small, but Silver looks like he has a decent amount of toys and posters. So, he’s not too judgmental. Jet sighs and hops off the seat. Silver thinks he’s going to leave, but instead he feels Jet placing the back of his hand to his forehead. He’s stone still the whole time.

“You don’t have a fever,” Jet tells him.

Silver can’t even look Jet in the face, “N-no.”

Jet’s serious face turns to that of a confident smirk, “Cool. Looks like you’re feeling better.”

Silver nods back slowly.

He lightly taps Silver’s forehead playfully before making his way out of the bedroom. He stops at the doorway and asks, “See you tomorrow?”

Silver gives him a smile and says with certainty, “Definitely.”

Jet gives him a toothy grin in return before rushing out and down the hall. He makes his way down the steps and stops when he feels a little flustered. He takes a moment to compose his emotions, but looks horrified when he sees Sonic staring at him with a smug look from the kitchen.

Jet’s eyes dart away and he rushes out the door, “I have to go! Bye!”

Sonic just snickers at him and finds it cute. “Sure you do,” Sonic murmurs under his breath as he watches him go.

Silver stomps down the stairs a moment later and he shouts, “You planned that, didn’t you!!!”

Sonic looks away with an innocent face, “I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

Silver rushes over to Sonic, his face still flushed with embarrassment as he smacks his small hands against Sonic angrily, “You did! You *so* did! Why else would you be waiting by the window, you jerk!?!”

“It’s a beautiful day. I wanted to look outside,” Sonic responds with a shrug, “Is that illegal now?”

Silver gets fed up and lets out an irritated noise, “You’re unbelievable!” Silver marches back to the stairs, grumbling under his breath.

Sonic leans his elbow against the kitchen counter and asks, “Is he nicer when you two are alone?”

Silver stops midway up the stairs and mulls over it for a moment. He begrudgingly looks back at Sonic before mumbling, “Yes...”

Sonic’s smile widens and he nods in understanding, “Thought so.”

Silver huffs and makes his way back upstairs. Mostly to do his homework, but also to recollect on everything that had happened.

As much as he hates to admit it, it was really nice to see Jet today.

## The Pain Persists



### Chapter Sixteen: The Pain Persists

Zero's fingernails tap against the concrete wall impatiently as they wait for dispatch to get there. This was the fourth time the jackals have targeted the wall and he's getting really irritated at the repetition of this. If they were going to do this right they should have done so the first time.

"Try to remain calm," Shadow states. The impatient tapping Zero is making is starting to irritate him now.

Zero growls and grates his nails against the concrete making an awful sound that rivals that of nails on a chalkboard. He watches Shadow's ears twitch in annoyance at it and he scoffs because he's made his point, "Practice what you preach."

Shadow refuses to say anything in return.

Zero narrows his eyes at him and turns his attention to Omega, "What is the humidity? My lungs feel like they're pooling with water."

Omega begins to process the information.

"Don't answer that," Shadow orders the robot.

Omega's systems cool down after he hears Shadow's words.

"Oh, come on," Zero grits out before pushing himself off the wall, "I was simply asking."



“It’s been 100% since sunrise,” Shadow informs him even though he knows he shouldn’t, “We’re in a damn jungle, Zero.”

“Excuse me,” Zero says with mock politeness, “I am a desert dweller.”

“Then, dwell on our mission instead,” Shadow retorts with a scowl, “I get it. We’ve been out here for weeks on end and we’re getting under each other’s skin. Don’t make this harder than it needs to be.”

“Our ‘mission’ is sitting around waiting for a chopper to get here,” Zero responds forcing down his own anger.

“Perhaps if you were ready for any of our missions I wouldn’t have to keep saving your ass,” Shadow shoots back, “Now, shut up and stay vigilant.”

“Oh, I will stay vigilant,” Zero snarls out before pushing Shadow against the wall.

Shadow feels his anger rising and before Zero can throw a punch, he’s grabbing the jackal’s wrist and twisting his body around so Zero’s face is pressed up against the concrete. “Keep this up, Zero,” Shadow states, applying more pressure to Zero’s twisted wrist, “I’ll have dispatch pick *you* up too.”

Omega looks like he’s enjoying the show, putting dibs on Shadow winning this fight if it were to go down.

Zero goes to struggle, but lets out a painful wail when he feels the pain shoot up from his wrist. He glares at Shadow from over his shoulder before shaking his head, “Fine, fine...” Zero gasps as the feeling suddenly returns in his hand. He rubs his wrist and muses, “You know, when I pictured working with the Ultimate Life Form, I did not expect...*this*.”

“Get whatever it is you’re trying to say out now because after this you’re to remain silent until dispatch arrives,” Shadow warns him.

“High energy. Destruction. *Power*. A path of fire in our wake,” Zero starts to say.

Omega’s head perks at that, “I like destruction. Let’s do destruction.”

Zero holds his fist high in the air and continues, “You have limitless power within your fingertips. You could end this all now. Why do you hesitate?”

“Because our missions don’t require mindless destruction,” Shadow explains, “They require careful planning and precision.”

“Such a waste,” Zero shakes his head in disappointment, “What happened to the Shadow who would unleash his raw power on anyone who dared to oppose him?”

“Your freedom to speak has expired, Zero,” Shadow grits out, his fists balled to his sides. He turns away from him and frowns. He doesn’t want to go back to that. He never wants to be that again. Even their current mission was giving him horrible flashbacks of who he once was. He doesn’t want to be out here anymore. He wants to be home. He wants to be with his family.

After dispatch does arrive, he requests a moment to himself because he desperately needs it. If he has to listen to Zero’s rookie babble about power or whatever, he might just use said power on him. Zero is good for what he is. A replacement. That’s about it. Shadow never thought he’d miss a lighthearted, interpersonal connection.

He looks down at his phone. There's about four missed calls and a dozen texts from Sonic. He's had time to call him, but he hasn't had the heart to do it. The last time they've talked he could hear the pain in Sonic's voice. He doesn't want to know how much his absence has hurt him since then.

Although ignoring him like this might make things worse. Shadow's thumb hits call before he can talk himself out of it and listens to the soft rings in his ear. To his surprise, Sonic doesn't answer. He's about to leave when he feels it go off again.

Shadow answers it and Sonic's voice is frantic when he picks up, "Hello!? You still there!? I'm here!"

Shadow lets out a small, exasperated laugh, "Yes."

Sonic lets out a big sigh of relief, "Aw, man! Thank goodness."

"And what were you doing?" Shadow asks with a bit of amusement because Sonic always has his phone on him.

Sonic grumbles a little before answering, "Silver's making me do dishes. Well, I'm drying them, but that's still *doing* them. Apparently he's tired of eating cereal out of coffee mugs and measuring cups."

Shadow finds himself laughing. He'd usually be mad about something like that, but he misses home so much he doesn't much care. "It's nice to know there's a grown up in the house," Shadow remarks.

"I know, right?" Sonic says with a laugh, but stops when he realizes what Shadow means. "Oh, good one, Shadow. I'll have you know I'm taking care of things on my end," Sonic says defensively.

"I don't doubt that," Shadow says with an adoring tone, finding the situation as a whole endearing.

"Someone's in a good mood," Sonic states, smugly.

Shadow won't say that it's only because he's talking to him. Otherwise, his day has been pretty awful. He merely sighs and asks, "How is Silver doing?"

"Good. Really good actually," Sonic responds with a happy tone, "His grades have skyrocketed ever since he was put in that new program. The poor kid must have just been bored out of his skull."

"That's good to hear," Shadow says in an approving way.

"Wanna talk to him? Tell him you're proud and stuff!?" Sonic shouts and there's muffled noises on the other line. Shadow hadn't even gotten the chance to answer. Although when the line comes back to life it's Sonic again. "I'm sorry Shad-Dad. Silver is being a little grump right now. I think it's my fault," Sonic explains with a sheepish laugh.

Shadow frowns at that. He wonders if Silver harbors any animosity for him being gone so long or if he truly was just in a bad mood. He wouldn't blame him if it were the former. Not only was Shadow not present, he had been avoiding phone calls. Perhaps Sonic was right and that he does care if Silver hates him because there's this intense feeling squeezing at his heart.

"Shadow?"

Shadow swallows his emotions down when he hears Sonic's voice and he responds, "I'm here. I'm

sorry.”

“Hey, it’s okay. Don’t worry,” Sonic brushes it off, “Oh! We went to go visit Rouge the other day! She told me that you need to come rescue her from the clutches of a crazy echidna. I don’t think that poor woman has seen the light of day since she got pregnant.”

“Heh. That idiot. He is like a dragon hoarding it’s treasure,” Shadow states darkly, “I’ll knock him one the next chance I get.”

“Just distract him long enough for me to take her out for coffee or something,” Sonic replies with a slight laugh.

“Understood,” Shadow says sharply as he would a mission from his commander. Although there’s a slight tinge of humor to it.

There’s a disruption on Shadow’s end though. A soldier walks into the private quarters and salutes Shadow before stating, “Agent Shadow, you’re needed out on the field at once.”

There’s a sense of dread that washes over Shadow’s body. There’s so many things he wants to tell Sonic, but he currently just wants to immerse himself in his life at home. He misses it dearly.

“Sonic, I need to…”

“I know,” Sonic says from the other line, “I heard. It’s okay.” There’s a quiet moment between them before Sonic finally blurts out, “I miss you.”

Shadow’s heart swells with emotions when he hears how freely he admits it. He runs his hand down his face, trying to compose himself.

“Agent Shadow,” the soldier says once more.

“Yes. Yes, I know,” Shadow address the soldier before responding to Sonic in a quieter tone, “I miss you too, love. I’ll speak with you again as soon as I’m able.”

“Sounds good,” Sonic says with wavering optimism, “You do you. I’ll wait for you.”

Shadow cradles the phone in his hand before mumbling a good-bye to him. It’s getting harder and harder to talk to him. Mostly because he doesn’t want to say good-bye. For once, he’d like to tell him he’s coming home or tell him a definite date.

He makes his way out of the room and stops when he feels Zero’s presence behind him. He turns to see said jackal leaning against the wall just outside the door he’d come from.

Zero gives Shadow a knowing smirk before pushing off it and walking with him down the corridors. He keeps his voice low so only they can hear it, “You know, I *thought* you were acting quite odd lately. I think I have finally put the pieces together.”

Shadow glares at Zero from the corner of his eye.

“When you said everyone feared being stripped of their lives back home, I did not expect you to be talking about yours…*and your family*,” Zero states with an amused tone.

“You shouldn’t be spying on others, Zero,” Shadow gives him a heated warning.

Zero holds his hands up like he’s innocent, “I was merely awaiting my leader’s next orders.”

Shadow eyes him like he doesn't believe him.

"Intimate attachments like that will only prevent you from reaching your full potential," Zero goes on to explain.

Shadow's strides get quicker like he doesn't want to continue this conversation.

Zero sees this and shouts down the corridor after him, "They are holding you back, Shadow!"

Shadow shakes his head and blocks Zero's words from his mind.

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The Jackal Squad never leaves a trace of where they've been. So, seeing the carvings and marks along the trees just outside the perimeter was a red flag. Shadow can't imagine there being many more still alive. They must be getting desperate and started setting traps for them.

Which is all the same for Shadow. If they wanted to end this now, he was more than willing.

Zero grazes his palm across the tarnished bark and murmurs under his breath, "He's here."

Shadow begrudgingly asks, "Who?" He doesn't want to speak to Zero after what had happened, but he needs to know what's going on.

"Their leader," Zero responds with a vengeful tone, "My father."

Shadow eyes Zero suspiciously. He had not known Zero was the leader's son. Nor has Zero told anyone of this. "You're sitting this one out," Shadow orders as he motions toward the prison, "I'm calling you off this mission."

Zero takes a step back and gives Shadow a look of betrayal, "What!? No! I trained all my life for this!"

"If I would have known your reason for joining GUN was vengeance, I would have never agreed to having you on my team," Shadow states sternly.

"You would deny me my revenge!?" Zero shouts with anger.

"If you don't go willingly, I'll use force," Shadow warns him.

Zero just stares at Shadow like he's utterly confused, "Who... are you?"

Shadow gives Zero a disappointed look before turning to Omega, "Contact HQ and have them send a chopper to pick Zero up."

Zero's laughter comes out quietly before it reverberates from his diaphragm. He takes a few more steps back before saying, "And here you wanted my trust. You are no more a disappointment than everyone else in my life, but I suppose that is just to be expected."

Shadow's eyes narrow when he sees Zero backing off, a step from fleeing. "Zero," Shadow says carefully and he takes a few steps forward, "Vengeance is a dangerous road to go down. One that is unsatisfying. It leaves you empty and craving more."

"It is not just vengeance," Zero grits back, "It's an eye for an eye. It's justice."

Shadow shakes his head, "That isn't how justice works, Zero."

Zero huffs out another laugh and retaliates, “Maybe not *your* justice. Or more so, your current justice. You are a shell of a man you once were. You are nothing more than a superficial lie. I know the truth. I know who you really are. You can hide under this world’s luxuries and have them bog you down, but only until you purify yourself will you see the true meaning of purpose.”

Shadow takes one visible step backwards at Zero’s words and gives him a disturbed look, “I think you’re confused. If you come back to base, we’ll talk about this more.”

“I’m not confused! I have never seen more clearly!” Zero shouts angrily, “It is *you* who is confused! That blue *rat* has poisoned your mind with his lies!”

Zero is unhinged. It’s becoming more and more evident. Shadow needed to get him out of here now before he hurts someone else or himself.

Shadow just nods to him with open arms, “You’re right, Zero. Now, let’s go back to base, okay? You can tell me *everything* and I’ll listen.”

Zero searches Shadow’s eyes and growls at him, “You’re lying. You *reek* of fear.”

Before Shadow gets a chance to respond, there’s a rustle in the thick brush of vegetation. Zero turns to it, ears perked up. It’s dark, but he can see the two glowing eyes within the darkness. It’s like a phantom, his father’s form just barely visible before it disappears again.

“Zero,” Shadow warns him.

“So, he finally decided to show his face,” Zero says as he gazes into the darkness.

“Do not pursue him, Zero,” Shadow states with an unyielding tone, “That is an order.”

Zero glances at Shadow from over his shoulder and wraps his fingers around the hilt of his sword, “I am sorry, but I no longer take orders from you, Shadow.”

Shadow’s eyes narrow and his hands crackle with electricity, “Fine.” Shadow lunges forward and goes to grab Zero’s wrist, but before he can his eyes widen. It was quick as if Zero had already read his movements. Shadow’s breath hitches as a shaky hand lifts to his chest. It’s warm and the warmth seeps into the fabric of his gloves. He slowly lifts his hand up and sees the blood.

Zero’s shaking and his eyes wide at the sight of the gash across Shadow’s chest.

“Zero...” Shadow wavers a little and he falls to his knees.

Zero turns sharply and disappears into the vegetation, running away from what he’d just done.

“I will bring you back so you can get medical attention,” Omega tells Shadow, holding his hands out for him.

“N-no,” Shadow wheezes out before trying to pull himself onto stable footing, “I need to go after him.”

“You are losing blood and...” Omega starts to say.

“Track Zero,” Shadow interrupts him quickly, “The sooner we get him, the sooner I can get medical attention.”

Omega stands still for a moment as if he’s trying to override his commands, but he just nods and pulls Shadow in his arms, “Allow me to be your assist.”

Shadow grips his wound with his arm and just nods at Omega's request.

Omega plows through the jungle using any means necessary. Whether that be charging or blasting through. Zero is fast though. If Shadow weren't wounded, he'd be able to keep up, but with Omega it was a little more difficult. Omega's sensors haven't lost him yet though. So, he doesn't give up.

Omega is also keeping a close eye on Shadow's vitals. If he feels like Shadow is in critical condition or if he passes out, he's overriding his commands to bring Shadow back immediately.

There's a loud shout of anger directed at the sky and it jolts Shadow enough to pull himself out of Omega's arms. Fear and worry hammer at his heart, fearful the worst has happened to Zero. Shadow bursts through the bushes and into a clearing, but pales by what he sees.

Zero's sword is plunged deep into a chest of a jackal. He tackles the body and begins stabbing at it with anger. The blood sprays on his face, mixing with tears as they fall.

Shadow swallows and rushes over to Zero's side. He grabs Zero's hands to stop him.

"No, I need to do this! I need to--!" Zero shouts in a rage.

Shadow rips the sword out of Zero's grip and tosses it to the side. Shadow heaves his breath and whispers, "It's done, Zero."

Zero looks down at the body under him. A mess of blood and wounds and he covers his face with his hands. He lets out a wail of agony, "He deserved worse! This was a merciful death compared to...!" Zero stops when he hears the rustling of leaves and branches above. He snarls and gets to his feet, seeing the glowing yellow eyes around him. "This is your leader! This is what I've done to him! His kills are *mine*! I am Zero no more! Hear me!?"

The eyes slowly fade and flicker away.

Zero's shoulders sag as the adrenaline begins to lull out of his system. He falls to his knees in front of Shadow and sobs into his hands, his shoulders bobbing up and down.

"Troops will be on their way shortly," Omega informs them.

Shadow hisses when he hears that. He looks over at the mangled body and then down at Zero's weeping form. This looked bad. He should have seen the signs sooner. Zero was not stable enough for this kind of mission. He was weighed down by grief and vengeful thoughts. Zero would run the risk of taking the fall for all of this.

Shadow winces at that and kneels down in front of Zero. He places his hands on his shoulders and shakes him, "Listen to me, Zero. This was self-defense, alright?"

Zero blinks as he takes in Shadow's words.

"When they take you in, tell them it was self-defense, understood?" Shadow explains again clearly.

Zero doesn't understand what Shadow's getting at. Was he... helping him? Zero nods slowly.

"Good," Shadow pats his shoulder before painfully pulling himself onto his feet. He slowly makes his way over to Omega.

Omega glances from Shadow to Zero and states, "Shadow, that was not..."

"I know," Shadow nods to him. He makes his way around Omega's form and pops open one of his

compartments. He pulls out his memory chip and slides it into the cuff of his glove before popping it back closed. He pats Omega's shoulder and says, "System reboot, Omega. Your memory chip was stolen and I will compile a new one when we get back to HQ."

"Understood, Agent Shadow," Omega states as his systems come back on.

Zero gives Shadow a confused look, "What...?"

Shadow places his finger to his own lip to signal for him to be quiet, "Self-defense. That's all you need to know."

Omega turns to Shadow and informs him, "You are bleeding, Agent Shadow."

Shadow nods to him. He lifts his arm away from his wound and sees the gash. He feels his vision blur a little, but he tries to hold it together.

He manages to stay acutely aware of the soldiers arriving and examining the body. He also sees them detain Zero, putting him in cuffs. After that, Shadow isn't aware of anything.

His mind shuts off.

## Tentative Trust



### Chapter Seventeen: Tentative Trust

Shadow is met with a sterile room and the sounds of beeping. He's definitely in pain as he slowly begins to remember everything that had transpired. He hopes it's only been hours and not a few days.

"Hello," one of the nurses comes to Shadow's side and she's blonde with blue eyes and he has to blink a few times to realize that—no, it isn't Maria. She's much older and her face is slightly different. "You have a visitor," she tells him, "Should I let him in?"

Shadow prays it isn't Sonic. He doesn't want him to see him like this. Not with how he's worried him. "Sure," Shadow responds before trying to position himself up a little.

She turns back to draw open a curtain and Espio steps inside, "He's ready to speak with you, detective."

Espio nods to her, "Thank you."

Shadow breathes a sigh of relief.

"How are you feeling?" Espio asks as he politely takes a seat next to the hospital bed.

"Depends," Shadow mutters, "Am I still on Prison Island?"

"Yes," Espio confirms.



Shadow nods, feeling relief in that. He's only been out for a few hours then.

"We have Zero in questioning," Espio informs him.

Shadow nods as if he knows.

"How much do you remember from what happened?" Espio asks with a frown, "Did... Did Zero...?" He motions to Shadow's chest.

Shadow looks away and sighs, "No."

Espio gives Shadow a concerned look. He can see right through Shadow's response. He's greatly troubled by this. "Shadow... You don't need to cover for him," Espio states quietly.

Shadow doesn't respond. He can't see that kid go away for something he himself has done in the past.

Espio stands up and says, "I get it. You must still be in shock from what happened. I will give you some time to recover. Once you are discharged though, I highly suggest coming to see me."

"Has Sonic been informed?" Shadow murmurs tiredly.

"No," Espio shakes his head, "Would you like me to inform him?"

"No," Shadow says quietly, "I'd like to do so myself."

Espio nods, "Very well. I will inform everyone of your request." Espio bows to him and makes his way out. The nurse lifts the curtain for him and he's out of sight after that.

Shadow sees his belongings on the chair next to where Espio was once sitting. He clicks the bar down on the bed and reaches for his gloves. When he sees Omega's memory chip still tucked away inside it, fear grips his chest.

What was he doing?

-

He doesn't get out until the next morning. His mind is a wreck, he hasn't called home, and he has no idea what's going to become of Zero. He just needs to talk to him, but he doubts he'll get the chance until he's released.

Shadow feels personally responsible that Zero is chasing after a mirage of a person he once was. He needs to talk to him and try to get him out of this mindset. It's possible. He knows it is. He just needed time. Time he currently didn't have.

Shadow requests a uniform because he doesn't want to be around other soldiers sporting his fresh wounds. It's weird and uncomfortable, but it's better than the former.

A chopper is requested for him, but he still needs to speak with Espio before he departs. Hopefully, if things go according to plan, he'll be leaving with Zero.

Shadow meets with Espio and Vector in front of one of the interrogation rooms. Zero is inside, looking dirty, cold, and scared. Shadow tries not to stare too long.

"You requested I come by," Shadow states almost too professionally.

Espio nods, “Yes, it seems as though Zero is saying it was self-defense.”

“I see,” Shadow says as if he doesn’t already know.

Espio isn’t fooled though. He goes onto the next order of business regardless. “I think we can pin this murder on him,” Espio explains.

“If it was self-defense, how can it be murder?” Shadow tests, “This is *war* after all. Their side attacked ours first.”

Espio’s face drops, “I’ve seen the body, Shadow. There’s multiple contusions. 20 stabs wounds. This was excessive force. We’re talking life.”

“You’d send a kid to jail for life,” it isn’t a question.

“He isn’t a kid, Shadow,” Espio counters, “He’s 21. He’s a legal adult.”

“You think that matters? He has his whole life ahead of him,” Shadow mutters as he thinks back to his own memories, “I was fifteen when I was put in a stasis chamber for *fifty years*. No offense, but legal age doesn’t mean *shit* to me.”

Espio just looks Shadow over before frowning, “Vector and I are only private detectives. Since this happened on GUN property and with their soldiers, we cannot use the body as evidence. It’s out of our jurisdiction. So, all we have to go by are eye witnesses. There were two there. You and Omega. You can help us bring Zero to justice.”

Shadow looks over at Zero. His hair is a mess and still caked with day old blood. Was this justice? That word was starting to lose its meaning a little. “I’m sorry,” Shadow says quietly, “I don’t remember the events of yesterday.”

Espio is just staring at Shadow in shock. He takes a step forward and whispers to him, “Might I remind you that Sonic’s life is on the line here. He’s the *target*. Don’t get emotionally invested in this case.”

Shadow just exchanges a look with Espio before stating, “Perhaps it is *you* who is getting emotionally invested.”

Espio looks both astonished and angry this time. “Fine, if you aren’t going to help then I’ll find the answers I need from Omega’s database,” Espio grits out as he begins to walk past Shadow.

Shadow stops him and responds coldly, “Not without a warrant.”

Espio glares at Shadow, “Don’t do this.”

“If you have nothing against Zero, I suggest releasing him. You are all about *legal* issues. It’s illegal to hold someone without probable cause,” Shadow tells him.

Espio pulls out his kunai and presses it against Shadow’s neck as he hisses out, “I will get my evidence. With or without a damn warrant, Shadow.”

Shadow doesn’t move. He just gives Espio a stale look, “Probably not best to assassinate me in a highly monitored government building.” He glances up at the camera and is impressed by how Espio had drawn his weapon and held him there just out of the camera’s sight.

Vector pulls Espio away from Shadow and pushes him down the hall, “I can’t believe I’m sayin’ this

to *you* of all people, Espio, but go take a walk!” Vector watches Espio go with a disappointed look before glancing down at Shadow. “I sure hope you know what you’re doin’, Shadow,” Vector says like a covert warning before making his own leave.

Shadow rubs the sore spot on his neck. Espio hadn’t drawn blood, but the pressure was still there. He had got what he wanted. To what end or cost, he’s not sure, but he’d done it.

He makes his way to the door and opens it. The moment it opens, Zero looks up like a terrified, cornered animal. When he sees that it’s Shadow, he frowns and whispers, “I said it was self-defense.”

Shadow nods, “Good job.” He motions his head out the door, “Let’s go home.”

Zero just stays where he is and looks over Shadow like he must be joking. When Shadow just simply holds the door open for him, he carefully gets up. He follows Shadow down the corridors and can see every eye on him. He tries his best to ignore it.

Shadow leads him to the chopper waiting for them and they get on.

Home bound at last.

-

They’ve been gone for a little over a month and the detachment of the city is strange. The warm, tropical climate they’ve gotten accustomed to is now cold. Especially after the sun goes down.

Shadow drives Zero home. The jackal is closed off and holding his knees to his chest. Shadow’s jacket around his quivering shoulders as the street lights flick over them like rhythmic dashes. They get to Westopolis and Shadow walks Zero up to his apartment.

Zero walks into his room, but Shadow stops him from closing the door on him, “I’m coming in with you.”

Zero doesn’t have the energy to argue. He lets Shadow follow him in. There isn’t much. It’s dim and dingy. The sofa looks like it’s sat where it’s been for thirty years. Worn down, broken, and out of style. There are a few tables, but they’re very much the same. Everything must have been used and reused over and over just for the fact that no one’s wanted to put in the effort of throwing it out.

“Get cleaned up. We’ll talk after,” Shadow informs him.

“Yeah, yeah...” Zero states, tossing Shadow’s jacket back at him as he makes his way into the small bathroom in back.

Shadow shrugs the jacket back on and carefully buttons it up, mindful of his wound. He pulls out his phone and thinks about texting Sonic, but stops himself. Sonic will want to talk. He doesn’t exactly feel comfortable talking to him in front of Zero. Instead, Shadow makes his way into the bedroom. A singular mattress is splayed out on the hard, wooden floor. He takes a seat on it anyway.

Shadow loses track of time with his own thoughts that he doesn’t hear Zero walk in until he’s sitting down on the bed and lounging next to him. There’s an awkward silence between them before Zero says, “So... I am unclear as to what I had done to deserve your kindness.”

“Punishing you for taking down the leader of the group we were after seemed asinine,” Shadow remarks.

Zero sighs and lulls his head back, “Your pity is beginning to get on my nerves.”

Shadow doesn’t say anything to that.

Zero clutches his eyes tight and whispers, “It is making me want to *trust* you...”

Shadow turns his head to look at Zero.

“You might be the only one I am considering trusting...” Zero grumbles angrily. There’s a moment of silence and Zero calms his nerves a little. He looks up at Shadow and sees that he’s looking back at him. Zero’s eyes soften a bit before turning away, “What was it like... the first time you killed someone?”

Shadow’s eyes harden as the memories flood into his mind. It’s a thought he hadn’t visited for awhile, but he knew it would remain intact within the synapses of his mind for life. “I wanted to feel vindicated,” Shadow murmurs quietly, “I wanted to feel justified. I wanted what I was doing to be right.”

Zero lets an empty laugh leave his mouth, “Were you?”

“No,” Shadow responds a bit gravelly, “He was no longer the same man he once was. Fifty years changes people.”

“What did he do to you?” Zero asks curiously.

Shadow presses his fingers together and cringes at the memory that’s still very vivid in his mind, “He killed my sister.”

Zero nods as if to say he doesn’t blame him, “Any last words?”

“He...” Shadow starts, but pauses to remember fully, “He said he was sorry.”

“Ouch,” Zero says with a huff, “Cannot even let you enjoy it.”

“I said... ‘No, you’re not,’” Shadow whispers quietly, having been the first time he’s said it out loud, “I desperately wanted to be justified. I wanted him to feel how I had, but now... I could tell he already had.”

Zero is quiet, looking up at the ceiling as he lets Shadow words sink in.

“I don’t want you to walk down this path, Zero,” Shadow says, “Lives are heavy burdens to bare. Who I was back then isn’t someone I’d recommend becoming. It’s cold and lonely and...confusing. You begin to believe your own madness after awhile.”

“How do you even learn to live any other way?” Zero asks with a grave seriousness to his voice, “You cannot relate to anyone. No one has felt your pain. No one has lived the life you have lived. No one wants to hear about any of it. Just to interact with the outside world is like...putting on a mask and becoming someone you are not.”

That hits Shadow deep. Only because it’s true. He has opened up to a few. He has talked about it before, but none of them truly understand the pain. No one can really relate to the suffering.

“I suffered for *years*. In silence among my people. I pretended it was okay, but it hurt. The evidence was clear as day on my face, but it was a sign of weakness instead. No one wanted to listen. No one *cared* about the awful things he had done to me. To my mother. We were caged inside his

ideologies, but then again... I was too weak to prevent anything. If I could be strong, if I could prove it," Zero grits out, feeling himself fighting the tears in his eyes as he grips his arms tightly, wishing to bleed before willing himself to cry, "I finally got what I had always wanted, Shadow. I proved my worth to them, but... Was it good enough?"

Shadow shifts a bit. He guides Zero's head closer and Zero rests his head against Shadow's lap. He places his hand on Zero's shoulder and it feels reminiscent to what he'd do with Silver when he was younger and needed comfort. "You don't have to prove your worth to anyone," Shadow whispers to him, "You're already worth something in my eyes."

Zero tenses as he resists the urge to cry. He doesn't want it. He was stronger than that. Shadow's soothing hand is all it takes for him to lose it though. He's back to the moments where he'd lose himself to grief against his mother's shoulder. That spirals into the grief of his mother and it's a vicious cycle.

Shadow just lets him cry because he knows he needs it. He just hopes some of his words had gotten through to him. He stays the night just to make sure Zero doesn't do anything rash. The next morning he promises himself he'll go straight home.

# Together Again

## Chapter Notes

So, I'm taking a week break. I have a lot of stuff I need to catch up with on my end. It didn't feel right to leave it on that cliffhanger from last chapter. So, here's like a nice resting place for the story.

For those of you who are like "Maor smut hdskkhdshj!" That will be coming up next chapter. So hang tight.

Thank you guys for your wonderful comments and thank you for your patience. It's greatly appreciated. <3



## Chapter Eighteen: Together Again

Shadow wakes the next morning to his phone going off. Luckily, it doesn't wake Zero as he carefully slides off the mattress. He attempts to close the bedroom door, but it proves to be quite difficult because the thing looks like it had been ripped off the hinges at one point.

Instead, Shadow pads to the kitchen and answers it quietly, "Hello?"

It's Topaz and she sounds worried, "I never got a chance to speak with you yesterday. I heard you needed medical attention. Are you alright?"

Shadow places his hand on his chest. It stings a little, but it doesn't really hurt too much anymore.

"I'm fine," Shadow answers before asking, "Am I needed back at my post?"

Topaz sounds offended he'd ask, "What!? No! You had gotten hurt, Shadow! I'm not putting you back out there!"

Shadow winces because her voice is starting give him a headache. Or maybe irritate the headache he already has. "You think the other men can handle this?"

"Well..." Topaz begins to say, "We've identified the body. Apparently it was their *leader*. That must have taken a huge hit on them because we haven't seen any activity since. We're still on our guard and we'll keep our men down there just in case, but... I have reason to believe they fled."

Shadow nods, "Understood."

"My only orders to you now are to just relax, okay? I'm sorry you had to run that mission with pretty much your own team alone, but you did exceptionally well," Topaz says in a bit of a brighter tone.

It would be a compliment if he didn't know that it was his team that was holding the whole operation afloat. "Just keep me updated on any changes down there," Shadow states.

"Will do," Topaz responds, "Take care. I'll be in touch."

Shadow just nods back and ends the call. He tries to scrounge up a pen and paper. He leaves Zero a note telling him that if he needs him to call him. He hates leaving the guy like this, but he really needed to go back home.

-

Sonic is shredding guitar riffs in the kitchen as Silver claps his hands and chews on his cereal. He finds a lot of enjoyment in hearing his dad's song. Apparently the jingle for the commercial got approved and Silver is helping him come up with words to it.

All he really has so far is *Open your heart* to which Sonic keeps wailing it out like a rock star. It's really entertaining. Especially when Sonic gets a running start and slides on his knees across the kitchen floor.

If Shadow were here he would definitely yell at him for it.

Silver's smile drops. His senses are buzzing under his skin. He looks at the front door and gives it a serious look.

"What's up, Silver?" Sonic asks a bit jokingly as he pulls himself back onto his feet, "Didn't like that move?"

Silver's brows knit together before hopping off the chair. He stumbles on the kitchen tiles and runs for the door. His anger is boiling in his veins. He's seething and ready to spit fire. He rips the door open and the morning sun beams into the home. Shadow's foot is on the first step of the porch and Silver is glaring at him with all of the hatred he can muster.

Shadow sees this and he makes his way up the last step before he kneels down, opening his arms for the kid.

Silver's eyes glisten with tears. He promised himself he was going to be mad. He promised he was going to give him a piece of his mind. He promised he would. But the moment he sees the guilt in Shadow's eyes and how he softly murmurs the words he's been dying to hear: "Sorry." He can't

hold onto the hate that had been gathering in his chest. Instead, he rushes forward into his father's arms and cries in his chest.

Above all else, he missed him. He just wants to be with him. He just wants his father here and to hold him and to tell him everything is alright. Every angry thought he's held onto flutters away like ash and he's left with relief.

Shadow holds his son tightly in his arms and rubs his back. His eyes slowly make their way up to the doorway and he sees Sonic looking down at him like he's an apparition. Shadow lifts one arm out for him too and gives the same sad, regretful look he had Silver.

Sonic stumbles out onto the porch and wraps his arms around Shadow, burying his face into his neck. "You're home," Sonic whispers in awe like he can't believe it.

Shadow hisses from slight pain, but doesn't stop them. He wants to hold them both. He wants to be here for them. He wants to protect them and keep them safe. He feels Sonic pull away a bit and Shadow brushes away a few of his stray tears.

They both glance down at their sobbing child and do their best to comfort him. They only move until Silver's tears have dried up and Shadow carries him back into the house.

Silver brings out the record player to the living room and he needs a little time to himself because of how overwhelmed he feels. They don't push him, just let him be to gather his thoughts.

Sonic pulls Shadow in and kisses him deeply before taking Shadow's hands as they begin to dance. Shadow goes at a slow pace with the rhythm and holds Sonic close.

"Are they making it mandatory to wear uniforms now?" Sonic asks jokingly as he mocks him, "What happened to, 'These pieces of material are restrictive and aren't idealistic for combat?'"

Shadow sighs and guides Sonic back just a fraction before unclasping a few buttons and revealing the bandages.

Sonic's smile immediately drops and eyes widen when he sees it, "Are you okay!?"

Shadow places a finger to Sonic's lips and glances across the room at Silver. Luckily, the kid's focus is still on watching the record spinning. Shadow's eyes meet his concerned husband's and whispers, "Not in front of Silver."

Sonic swallows and nods.

Shadow pulls Sonic in closer as they continue their slow waltz and Shadow whispers in his ear, "I had a small run-in. I'm fine now. I believe it's over..."

Sonic smiles at those words and nuzzles the side of his face into Shadow's, "I knew you could do it, dude."

"I apologize for my absence," Shadow states mournfully.

"You're here now," Sonic replies softly, "That's all that matters."

"You forgive me way too easily," Shadow murmurs, his hands resting on Sonic's waist.

Sonic snickers a little, "If I don't, you'd never forgive yourself." He pulls away just enough to look Shadow in the eyes. His hands come up to rebutton the uniform before sliding them up to Shadow's



shoulders.

Shadow gives him a guilty look and allows Sonic to lean in and kiss him. Their lips meld together as one. Warm and sure, but there's a desperate longing as Shadow pulls him in to kiss back. Shadow's hand rests on the side of Sonic's face, guiding it to the side to deepen it further.

As they part, Sonic gives him a dazed look, "It's like the room is spinning when you kiss me."

Shadow shakes his head and gives him an exasperated look as he reminds him, "It is. We're dancing."

Sonic snickers and it turns into a full out bout of laughter as he stifles it against Shadow's shoulder.

Shadow smiles lightly at that, "I missed your laugh." He has and he means it. His days have been dark, dreary without it. It's something he feels he's often taken for granted.

"I missed your broody scowl," Sonic says through more laughter.

Shadow huffs out a small laugh and pulls Sonic closer, their foreheads come together as he stares into Sonic's eyes. Sonic lifts his hands to Shadow's chest once more, but watches as Shadow winces at it. He gives Shadow a worried look before stopping his feet and taking him by the hand. He guides Shadow up the stairs and into the bathroom.

"It's nothing. Really," Shadow tries to say as he feels the buttons coming undone one at a time, "I heal faster than humans."

"I know," Sonic says pulling the fabric away from Shadow's shoulders and eying the bandages wrapped around his chest. It appears Shadow has been exacerbating it a bit because some of the blood has seeped through the cloth. Sonic isn't surprised by this in the slightest. Shadow tends to disregard his own health time and again.

Sonic begins to unwrap the tarnished bandages and pulls out some new ones. When he gets to the raw skin underneath he tries to joke, "At least GUN had the courtesy to patch you up this time."

The other time Sonic is referring to was a smaller wound and it only happened because Omega didn't want to follow through with their stealth mission. It wasn't exactly Omega. It was more so a nick from a cab car. It was his own fault for not paying attention after he had landed on a busy street. That one really was nothing. He decided to let it be until he got home.

Shadow digs his fingers into the counter as Sonic begins to dab a wet rag against his wound. It probably would have been fully healed by now if it weren't for the chopper ride and the fact that he was on his bike to and from Westopolis.

"So..." Sonic starts to say as he begins to rewrap it with Shadow's help, "What was it?"

"Blade," Shadow states like it's nothing, "Sharp. A clean cut. So, I doubt there will be a scar."

"Wow," Sonic comments as he finishes up and starts to wash his hands, "What was fast enough to take *you* off guard?"

Shadow frowns at Sonic's comment. Yes, it was fast. As if Zero had learned quickly from their last altercation and could read his movements before he had done them. It seemed instinctual as well since even Zero himself was caught off guard. Perhaps he hadn't thought he'd actually land a hit. His skills were improving. Probably faster than he was even ready for.

“A mercenary,” Shadow answers gruffly, “I was... distracted with other matters.”

“You always say that, “ Sonic snickers, “I’d hate to see what the other guy looks like.”

Shadow doesn’t respond. He makes his way out of the bathroom and into the bedroom. He sighs when he sees the mess of clothes all over the floor. He disregards it and puts on something clean and a bit more comfortable than his starched uniform. He stops when he sees some of Silver’s clothes laying about as well.

“He’s been sleeping with me,” Sonic explains as if he knows what Shadow is wondering, “Keepin’ me company.”

Shadow nods in understanding. He’s glad they had each other. He hopes something like this doesn’t arise again. Not to this extent at least.

“Let’s get you set up,” Sonic states as he takes Shadow’s hand, “Wanna lay in bed or on the couch?”

Shadow looks away stubbornly. He doesn’t like being taken care of. “I’ll stay here,” he grumbles.

“Okay!” Sonic rushes to the bed and pulls the comforter back and fluffs the pillows.

“That isn’t necessary,” Shadow tries to say.

“You need rest,” Sonic tells him enthusiastically, “You gotta heal fast because you promised to take us out when you got back.”

He did promise that. He scowls and makes his way over to the bed. He climbs on it and watches Sonic tuck him in.

“Need anything?” Sonic asks brightly.

Shadow sighs in exasperation, “No.”

Sonic nods, “Alright. If you say so.” He begins to walk out of the room.

“Wait...” Shadow looks away with embarrassment.

“Yes?” Sonic drawls out with a smug look.

“Aspirin and a glass of water.”

“Comin’ right up!” Sonic shouts, darting out of the room.

Shadow settles against the pillows and breathes in. He never realized how much he’s missed the smell of home.

-

Shadow must have fallen asleep after he’d taken some painkillers because he wakes to Sonic’s soft voice. It takes him a moment to realize he’s reading and Silver is nestled between them listening to the story intently. It seems a bit early to be doing something like this, but he doesn’t question it because everyone seems to be content.

Silver notices Shadow shifting behind him. He doesn’t glance back, just keeps his back facing him. His thoughts are mixed up and confused and he completely misses two paragraphs Sonic has spoken out loud. He winces when he sees his father’s arm reach up, but it rests on Sonic’s side.

Sonic smiles when he feels it and places his own hand atop. He stops reading and addresses him, “Hey there, sleepyhead.”

Shadow lets their fingers lace together as he asks, “Why are you two here?”

This causes Silver to turn sharply and says assertively, “Isn’t it obvious? We miss you!”

Shadow doesn’t expect the sudden outburst, but Sonic is laughing out loud at it. Sonic shrugs Shadow’s way and remarks, “He’s not wrong.”

“I’m sor—“ Shadow doesn’t even get the chance to finish.

“You’re sorry? I spent over a month without my father and you want sit in here by yourself? That’s pretty selfish, don’t you think?” Silver retorts with a stern look.

Sonic gives Silver a sheepish look, “Easy, kiddo. Shad-Dad just needs some well deserved rest.” Sonic glances up at Shadow and winks, “He’s gunna take us to an amusement park this weekend, right?”

Silver’s eyes light up a little when he hears that.

Shadow looks between the two and gives them a tired look. How can he even say no now? “Yes, that is exactly what I’m going to do,” Shadow murmurs. It takes a moment for Sonic’s words to register in his head. He had lost track of time. “Why is Silver home today if it isn’t the weekend?” Shadow eyes Sonic suspiciously, “You didn’t happen to take him out of school.”

“It’s one of those teacher, school meeting things,” Sonic twirls his hand around, “And I’d never take Silver out of school without a good reason.”

Silver raises an eyebrow at Sonic.

Sonic’s smile widens like he’s trying to hint at Silver to back him up.

Silver looks like he doesn’t get it before it finally clicks in his head, “O-oh, right! No. Never.”

Shadow scowls at them because he can tell they’re lying. He points directly at Sonic, “Sparingly. Use those sparingly.”

Sonic just watches Shadow in awe for a moment before scooting a little closer, “Wait, you’re not gunna lecture me?”

Shadow doesn’t make eye-contact, he just lays his head back down and sighs, “No, I trust your judgment.”

Sonic just exchanges a shocked look with Silver like they both can’t believe what they’re hearing.

Shadow’s eyes are already closed as he motions to Sonic, “Continue reading. I did not mean to interrupt.”

They all nestle in closer as Sonic begins to read once more. Silver’s eyes are wide as he’s focused on what’s being said and Shadow is sneaking little peaks, his lips quirking in a small smile as he does so.

It’s nice to have everyone in one place. Even if it’s watching them read or helping Silver with homework or watching the two playing portable video games. Shadow even sees a little growth in Silver’s maturity. He’s more open with Sonic’s teasing and he’s a better sport when it comes to being

competitive.

Shadow doesn't usually condone eating in bed, but Sonic insists he doesn't move. ...And Silver insists they all eat together. So, naturally his hands are tied.

When it gets later, Silver falls asleep in their bed. Neither have the heart move him or put him in his own bed. So, Sonic turns the bedside lamp off and they settle down under the covers. Although Shadow doesn't expect the kid to go from laying on his back to cuddling up into his chest.

Sonic winces when he sees that and he silently tries to ask, 'You okay?'

Shadow looks down at the sleeping child. No, it doesn't hurt. Not much anyway. Shadow has just felt this divide in their relationship. Mainly from his doing. Terrified he'd influence him in any way. So, to have Silver this close felt...special in a way.

Shadow nods back to Sonic.

"He loves you, ya know?" Sonic says softly.

Shadow just nods once more, unable to look him in the eye.

Sonic smiles back and scoots closer. Shadow wraps his arm around Sonic and Sonic does the same in turn. They all fall asleep huddled together.

Together as a family at last.

## Fallout



### Chapter Nineteen: Fallout

As he suspects, it takes about two full days to heal and the wound is gone, unnoticeable. Which is good because he's sick of being in bed.

Sonic had already left to take Silver to school, so he uses this time to check some emails. So far, Topaz hasn't gotten back to him about anything, but it is still early. There's also a good chance there hasn't been any activity either.

Regardless, he checks and rechecks just to be sure. He hears the front door open. He can only assume that it's Sonic by how he kicks his shoes off and trudges into the living room. He smirks when he's right and he feels Sonic lean into him, a little clingy.

Shadow doesn't look over and continues what he's doing, but he's forced to stop when a trail of kisses makes its way up his neck to his cheek. He turns toward Sonic to ask what's wrong, but Sonic's lips are already against his. They're warm and sad and desperate.

"Please," Sonic pleads against Shadow's lips as he presses in closer.

Shadow rests his hands on Sonic's hips to stabilize him as he whispers back, "You don't have to beg." Shadow closes his laptop and places it on the coffee table before giving Sonic his undivided attention.

Their mouths come together and apart before delving in deeper. Their tongues twirl together, but Sonic is being strangely submissive. There's no fighting or playfulness. Just pure want.

Shadow has no arguments in the matter. He gently pushes Sonic back against the cushions of the couch and begins to strip off the blue hedgehog's pants.

As he's doing so, Sonic is pulling his shirt off from the back and tossing it to the side. Sonic's face is flushed red with desire and he motions his legs apart for Shadow. "C'mon..." Sonic whispers eagerly.

Shadow leans in and kisses Sonic's chest, tasting and licking at his flesh as he slides one finger into his heat. Shadow's brow furrows by how easy it goes in and slips in another. It goes in with the same kind of ease. They haven't done this in over a month and he's confused by this revelation.

"I couldn't stop thinking about you," Sonic murmurs out breathlessly, "Every moment I was alone..."

Shadow pulls his head up and gazes into Sonic's eyes. He gives him a regretful look before pressing a rough kiss against Sonic's trembling lips. "I'm sorry," Shadow whispers between kisses.

Sonic can feel the tears forming at the corners of his eyes and he doesn't want them. He chokes on a sob and pulls Shadow in for another kiss to mask the sound.

"Sonic..." Shadow murmurs against his mouth, his tone dripping with regret.

Sonic cups Shadow's face and closes his eyes in anger, "I should be stronger than this."

"Don't blame yourself," Shadow responds as he wipes the tears away from his eyes. He leans in to kiss Sonic's neck, sucking and nipping the sensitive area there as his fingers curl inside him.

Sonic chokes on a breath, this time from arousal. Sonic wraps his legs around Shadow's waist and begs, "Please, just give it to me."

Shadow just nods once and removes his fingers, basking in the sharp noise Sonic makes because of it. "This type of vulnerability is not unwelcomed," Shadow attempts to explain as Sonic's legs guide him closer. He feels himself pressed against Sonic's heat and he swallows down his emotions so he can continue, "I also had missed you. I felt as if I had to spend one more miserable day on that island, I'd go mad." Shadow thrusts his hips forward as a moan reverberates deep within his throat, finally encased by Sonic's intense warmth. He nuzzles into one of Sonic's pale hands and kisses his palm before murmuring, "I've craved your touch as well. This time apart from you has been just as agonizing for me."

Sonic looks Shadow in the eye, searching his fiery depths. He can see the scared and lost look mirroring back at him. It's painful, but reassuring to see all at once. He welcomes Shadow's lips and the way he presses down on him against the cushions. He feels grounded and secure. His hand slides down Shadow's back to his hip, silently indicating for him to move. Sonic immediately gets what he wants a moment later and he's moaning against Shadow's mouth.

"Tell me if it's too rough," Shadow whispers back.

Sonic just shakes his head, "I wanna *feel* it this time."

Shadow just nods back, his eyes in a daze as he looks down at his husband. His eyes desperate and needy, blown and staring at Shadow like he's his world. Everything from his face to his chest and shoulders, dusted with a red flush. His body open, begging for more. He gives with no second thoughts. He buries himself within that heat and feels Sonic already damp and leaking against his abdomen.

Shadow licks his lips and reaches down to stroke Sonic with each thrust of his hips, until his palm gets slick. He lifts his hand a moment later to breathe in his scent and lick his flavor from his fingers. He tastes good. Just like he remembers.

Sonic is gazing up at him with hooded eyes as he whispers, "You're so sexy, Shads..."

Shadow leans down and whispers into his ear, "No, you're delicious." Sonic's words urge him to quicken his pace which gives him more sweet croons from Sonic's mouth.

Sonic can feel him. Deep inside him, stretching him to his limits. Shadow's eyes are smoldering as he looks down at him. Shadow has full control and he wants him to. He wants to feel Shadow. He wants him under his skin, deep within his being. He wants him wholly.

Sonic throws his head back and bucks his hips, crying out in ecstasy. He feels his wrists being pinned down a moment later and he's having trouble blinking his eyes back into focus before he sees the ravenous look on Shadow's face.

Shadow's head dips down to Sonic's chest, nipping and sucking on the flushed skin. He growls out, drinking in each sensation that pulses through his body. Sonic was giving himself to him. Letting him have him. Sonic was *his*.

"Yes, yes... Yes, Shadow!" Sonic chokes out, feeling his nerves electrify to life. His muscles tense with each thrust and he croons out another loud, unrestrained moan. Shadow's fingers bite at his wrists, the slight pain complimenting the intense pleasure, "Take me, Shadow! Please!"

Shadow nods and pushes forward so Sonic's hips are off the cushions and he driving home with each thrust. Sonic's heat. His quivering walls all around him. It's smoldering at his soul and driving him mad with desire. "S-Sonic..." He hisses, his fingers squeezing around his lover's wrists.

Sonic gasps and his face contorts into a silent scream as he lets go without warning. His abdomen and chest are damp with his release, but he doesn't much care because he can feel Shadow filling him up a moment later.

Shadow's mind is a haze of feelings. Everything that had been built up, let go with a shuddering breath. He remains where he is though. Unmoving. Just so he can feel Sonic's fluttering walls around him in his afterglow.

Shadow takes a moment to cool his thoughts and his ears pick up a noise before he opens one eye. He looks down at Sonic who has his hand over his eyes, stifling the sobs coming from his mouth. Shadow is concerned when he sees this and he leverages himself down next to him, gently guiding Sonic's hands away from his face. Sonic immediately pulls himself into Shadow's chest and Shadow wraps his arms around him in return. He rubs Sonic's back as he hushes him softly.

"I love you, Shadow," Sonic whispers.

"I love you too," Shadow responds, placing a kiss to Sonic's forehead.

A moment later, Shadow guides Sonic into the bathroom and they shower together. They hold one another, lulling into a calm under the warm spray of water.

Shadow makes sure Sonic is cleaned up before they settle back down in their bedroom, laying next to each other and exchanging kisses here and there.

This was all such an overwhelming relief for both of them.

-

“Does he always stay after like this now?” Shadow asks as he’s driving them to the school to pick up Silver.

Sonic is slouched back with his feet on the dashboard as he shrugs, “Yeah, why not? Tails helped him make a hover board and he’s super into riding it now.”

Shadow makes a pensive noise before stating, “He can do so in the backyard.”

“Um... No offense, but the backyard is pretty small to be doing those kinds of tricks,” Sonic responds. He sees the worry cross Shadow’s face and he rolls his eyes, “He’s fine, dude. Relax. If you’re that concerned, Tails said he’d offer to make his shoes now.”

Shadow has a contemplative look as he replies, “Perhaps that’s for the best.”

“Sweet. I’ll shoot him a text,” Sonic says as he pulls out his phone.

“Outside of the classroom though,” Shadow tells him a bit strictly.

“What? Those things will probably be heavy to lug around everywhere,” Sonic tries to object.

Shadow’s stare gives him no room for argument though.

“Alright... I’ll order him a bag too then. Geez,” Sonic states as he continues to scroll through his phone.

Shadow doesn’t respond. He continues down the street and pulls up into the school. He parks where Sonic would normally. None of the teachers are in sight. This is a relief. Maybe he doesn’t hate that Sonic picks Silver up later in the day as much as he’d initially thought.

“Which bag do you think he’d like?” Sonic asks as he flips his phone around and scrolls through an assortment of different bag designs.

“Does it matter? As long as it’s big enough,” Shadow states dismissively.

Sonic flips his phone back around and taps his lip as he thinks, “I kinda like this *red* one.”

Shadow sighs and snatches the phone from Sonic’s hand. He taps the touch screen a few times before handing it back toward Sonic.

When Sonic sees the receipt on the screen for a baby blue and gold bag, he smirks at Shadow. He knew that would convince him to choose. Sonic raises an eyebrow at Shadow because he seems like he’s carefully looking out the window at something.

“Stay here,” Shadow orders as he pulls himself out of the car.

Sonic pushes his feet off the dash and pulls himself up into a sitting position. He sees Silver coming around the corner, but he pales when he sees Jet with him. “Oh no...” He rushes out of the car after Shadow, “Wait! Hold on!”

Shadow ignores Sonic as he finally makes his way over to the two, glaring at them.

Silver slowly backs up when he sees his father’s angry eyes.

“Get in the car,” Shadow grits out, pointing at the parked vehicle.



Silver's vocal chords feel frozen. He doesn't know what to do or say.

"*Now*," Shadow speaks with more force.

Silver quickly nods and bolts for the car.

Sonic finally meets up with Shadow when he sees Silver running past him. "Hold on, Shads. This isn't what it looks like," Sonic tries to defend.

Jet looks terrified. He quickly gets on his board and is about to ride away.

Shadow sees this though. He slams his foot down on the board and grabs Jet roughly by the wrist. He pulls the kid over to the wall and pushes him against the sharp bricks. His intense red eyes bore into his soul as he speaks, "If I ever see you with my son again I will make you regret it."

Jet shrinks back on trembling knees and nods his head obediently.

Shadow leaves it at that. He stomps back over to his husband, but stops when he sees the abandoned green board. He lifts his leg in the air and thrusts his foot down on the backend where the engine is. Shadow's shoe bursts with intense flames until the little engine gives and pops. Shadow kicks the damaged and sparking board to the side before continuing on his trek back to the car.

Sonic just watches him leave with his mouth open in surprise. He glances back at the board and then at Jet who is stifling tears against the brick wall.

Sonic goes to step forward, but Shadow's voice stops him, "Get in the car."

Sonic just exchanges an apologetic look with Jet and mouths to him, 'I'm sorry.' Jet just looks away as if he's just ashamed of himself.

"Sonic, *now*," Shadow calls out, firmer than the last.

Sonic just rolls his eyes and does as he's told. He gets back in the passenger's seat and glares at Shadow like he's disappointed in him as he taps his finger against the dash impatiently.

Shadow doesn't care. "We will talk about this when we get home," is all Shadow says as he starts the car back up and begins to drive.

Silver's face is plastered to the car window as he looks back at Jet as they go.

Sonic gives Silver a sad look and wishes things could have turned out differently.

-

Silver is being pulled into the front door by his arm and Sonic is in tow with Silver's board in his arms. Sonic sighs because Shadow is being too overdramatic about this and he carefully shuts the door behind him.

Shadow carts the kid into the living room and swings Silver's arm around with enough force to push him onto the couch. Shadow glares down at Silver, not even knowing where to start with him.

Silver sees this and tries to say, "Jet and I are friends!"

"I forbid you from seeing that boy again," Shadow responds sternly, "Do I make myself clear?"

Silver looks crushed by that, "No! He's my friend... We... um...!"

Sonic tries to cut in, “Shadow, listen to me. Jet’s a little rough around the edges, but he’s gotten a lot better.”

Shadow looks appalled by Sonic’s words. He makes his way over to him and asks, “Did you know about this?”

Sonic opens his mouth, but glances away with a sigh.

Shadow lets out a breath of air and pinches the bridge of his nose in irritation. He isn’t going to fight in front of Silver. He’s already learned his lesson on that. “I want to speak with you about this privately,” Shadow states before turning back to Silver.

Sonic just places his hands on his hips and taps his foot impatiently, keeping a close eye on Shadow to make sure he doesn’t go too far with this.

As Shadow makes his way back toward him, Silver sits on his knees and holds his hands together as he begs, “Father, please. Jet isn’t that bad. When we’re alone he’s nice and understanding and…”

“He’s *using* you,” Shadow snarls out, “He already knows how to set you off. Don’t be so open with him.”

Silver counters with anger, “He’s not using me! He’s helping me!”

Shadow shakes his head like he doesn’t want to fight about this any longer, “You are not to associate yourself with him anymore, Silver, and that’s final.”

“You can’t tell me what to do,” Silver grits back.

“I am your father and I have the power to,” Shadow retorts with calm anger.

“When it comes to this, no you *don’t*!” Silver shouts back as he pounds his fists against the cushions. As he says it, the light bulb on the ceiling fan above them pops and pieces of glass rain down.

Shadow winces at that. He gives the shards of glass under his feet and worried look before hardening his eyes on Silver, “If I see you hanging around that boy one more time, I’m pulling you out of school *permanently*.”

Silver gives him a slack jawed look like he couldn’t believe he was being given that ultimatum.

“You’re joking, right?” Silver asks with a dumbfounded look.

“I assure you, Silver. I am very serious,” Shadow responds with an unyielding look, “You will be homeschooled and that’s that.”

Silver’s eyes shift from Shadow’s to Sonic’s as if to ask him. When he sees Sonic wince and look away, he can tell Shadow’s words are truthful. Silver feels his eyes well up in tears and he gets up, pushing past Shadow. He runs up the stairs and when he gets to the top, he shouts out, “I hate you, father! I wish you never came home!!!” He runs down the hall to his room and slams the door. When he does, the picture frame on the top step gives way and it tumbles down the stairs, smashing on impact.

Shadow sighs and makes his way over to it so he can pick it up. It’s a family photo of them and he’s trying to pick up all the little pieces from the carpet. He walks to the garbage can in the kitchen and pours the shards inside before placing the picture on the countertop.

“Shadow…” Sonic tries to say in a careful tone.

“I’m not done talking with you,” Shadow informs him, “but first, I need a moment to clear my head so I don’t say anything I’ll regret later.” He walks into the garage and shuts the door. He doesn’t exactly slam it shut, but there’s still some force to it.

Sonic sighs in defeat and runs his hand through his quills, trying not to reply everything that had just happened in his head. He carefully makes his way up the stairs to make sure Silver is okay.

## Loss of Control



### Chapter Twenty: Loss of Control

Shadow tightens the bolt so hard that it dents the body of the bike and he's so frustrated with it, he throws the wrench across the garage as it clatters against the ground. He buries his face in his hands and tries to calm his building rage. He's trying so hard to control himself. He can't lash out right now.

Not when the vulnerable look on Sonic's face just hours prior fades into his memory. He tries to breathe. His fingers are twitching to kill something and it scares him. He's been on the battlefield for so long and being home so suddenly was such a harsh transition.

Shadow says he'll speak with Sonic later, but he doesn't know if he has the heart to even follow through with it. On one hand, Sonic had kept something of this magnitude from him, yet only hours ago Sonic felt so small and frail in his arms. He doesn't know what to do.

He almost wonders if he'd disappeared things would be better. He doesn't know how to keep anyone safe without shackling them down. He knows no other form of control.

He must have fallen asleep sitting on his stool with his head on the seat of his bike because there's a blanket over his shoulders. From Sonic no doubt. He pulls it tighter against himself, wanting to desperately be closer, but feeling the need to keep his distance.

His phone begins buzzing near his foot and he picks it up. He sees an unknown number on screen.

His eyes widen, wondering if it's somehow work related and answers, "Hello?"

“Ah... So, you *are* still up,” Zero’s voice sounds amused, “I thought an old man like you would be fast asleep next to his hubby.”

Shadow scrubs the sleep from his eyes and groans out, “What do you want, Zero? I told you to call only if you needed something.”

“I do need something,” Zero retorts teasingly, “I need your help.”

“Where are you?” Shadow asks, “You aren’t at home. I can hear the traffic around you.”

Zero laughs at that and it’s loud and jarring as ever, “I expect nothing less from GUN’s top agent. There is no doubt in my mind that you could find me if you needed to.”

“Do I need to?” Shadow asks with anger, getting tired of his games, “You better not be getting into any trouble.”

“Trouble? Me? Hold me at higher standards, Shadow,” Zero responds.

“You’re at a payphone,” Shadow remarks, ignoring his comment.

Zero chuckles and seems like he’s enjoying the gears turning in Shadow’s head, “Try not to make me wait too long.” The call ends shortly after.

“Tsk...” Shadow looks down at his phone with a tired look. It’s a little after 3am. He probably shouldn’t go, but he’s worried Zero is going to do something stupid.

Shadow traces the call and gets Zero’s location before heading out.

This was such a pain.

-

The streets are dark in Central City, but just as Shadow suspected there’s still traffic at this time of night. The highway was close and he can see the Red Gate Bridge from where he’s at.

When he gets to the payphone, he gives it an exasperated look. There’s no one there. He almost wonders if he’d gotten to local wrong.

“Up here,” Zero’s voice calls out.

Shadow turns and sees Zero sitting on one of the streetlights. He shakes his head and folds his arms across his chest, “What are you doing out here?”

“Blowing off steam,” Zero responds with a smirk, “Care to join me?”

Shadow just raises an eyebrow at him.

Zero rolls his eyes at Shadow and flips into the air before crashing through a window to a nearby building.

Shadow watches him in horror as he looks over the building. There’s construction signs all around and it’s clear the place is scheduled to be demolished soon. Shadow calls out, trying to keep his voice down, “Zero! Zero, get back here!”

He doesn’t get a response.

This irritates him because he knows he's going to have to go in after him now. Shadow looks around to make sure there's no bystanders about before using the wall of the building to run up on and push off. He grasps onto the streetlight and swings himself forward into the already shattered window, landing inside with a skid.

"Zero," Shadow calls out a bit louder this time, knowing full well there are no workers here at this time of night. His voice only carries, but he doesn't hear any response. He is taken by surprise when two hands grab his arm and fling him backward. Shadow catches himself before he can fall on the concrete ground and glares up at Zero, "We shouldn't be here."

"Why not?" Zero asks, standing tall and poised.

"This is private property," Shadow states.

Zero just stares back at him, "Who cares?"

"I do," Shadow shoots back.

"Alright," Zero says with a laugh, "Make me."

He cannot believe he's doing this. He could be in the comfort of his own home right now. He just gets into a stance before running at Zero. He tries to go at him head on, but Zero flips over him. Shadow skids to a stop in front of the wall.

"You are so much more creative than that," Zero taunts, "I have seen firsthand."

Shadow's glare hardens and he rushes at him again. He sends a few punches, but Zero dodges them easily. He sees an opening though and sends a devastating kick up to Zero's jaw.

Zero falls back and rubs the sore spot with a smirk, "Now, *that* is more like it."

"What are you playing at?" Shadow asks through clenched teeth.

"I just want to admire you in action," Zero says as he gets back onto his feet, "Personally. No distractions."

"All I'm hearing that that you want me to knock the sense back into you and drag your unconscious body out of this building," Shadow retorts with a snarl.

"Hear what you want," Zero says as he leaps into the air at Shadow and sends him a roundhouse kick.

Shadow grabs his leg and tosses him over his shoulder into the wall behind him.

Zero falls right through the plaster wall, landing in a pile of debris. He coughs a little and gives Shadow an impressed look, "How old are you? Have to be like... what? 60? 70 by now?"

Shadow shakes his head, not having time for this. He grabs Zero by the fur on his chest and tosses him back into one of the poles holding the structure upright. "That's none of your concern," Shadow grits out angrily, "You shouldn't be looking through unauthorized files either."

Zero writhes on the floor for a good moment because his back at met with the metal pole pretty hard. "I did not find out through GUN," Zero says as he evens his breath and gets back to his feet, "Your files were in the doctor's database."

Shadow raises an eyebrow at him.

Zero gives him a wide smirk, “You are immortal, are you not?”

“My body was in stasis for 50 years,” Shadow responds.

“I know, I know,” Zero waves his hand at him, “You have not aged though. You also act...older. So, spill.”

“If you’re asking my actual age,” Shadow begins to say with anger, “I am 29.”

“That it?” Zero asks with a snicker, “Man... with how you act, you seem like an ancient artifact.”

Shadow narrows his eyes at Zero and charges at him. Zero is expecting it though as he swings his body around the pole limberly and sends his foot straight into Shadow’s face. Shadow goes down and he cups his nose with his hand. He feels the blood drip down it and he licks at it. The tang of copper hits his palate and he wipes it away with the back of his hand. That was actually a solid hit. Not bad.

“You could say that,” Shadow murmurs as he feels the blood pumping faster in his veins, “After all, I am a god.”

Zero watches him in awe, a smile slowly spreading across his face, “I knew it. That ‘Ultimate Life Form’ bullshit is so modest.”

“There’s truth to it,” Shadow retorts as he sends a punch at Zero and watches him block it, “Recreated by humans.” He slams his forehead into Zero’s and sees him stumble back. He kicks him down and pins him to the ground. He curls his hand into a fist and aims for his face.

Zero dodges his head out of the way and feels the concrete crack on impact of Shadow’s fists. Zero looks impressed by that before tucking his legs under Shadow’s torso and kicking him off. He flips back onto his feet, dodging one attack after another that Shadow delivers. “Oh, naïve humans... One day they will dig too deep and create their own graves,” Zero says a bit comically.

Shadow cannot help, but agree. Although, he retorts, “That is precisely why I’m here.”

Zero blocks one of Shadow’s kicks with his arms and ducks under it before striking a blow into Shadow’s back. “Why protect the human race? Why not let nature take its course?” Zero questions.

Shadow stumbles forward, but catches himself before he can fall. His shoes ignite and he drifts backwards, sending his elbow straight for Zero’s face, “Same reason I protected you.”

Shadow’s statement takes Zero by surprise and Shadow’s elbow collides with his cheek. He wavers back and rubs the battered flesh there.

“I’m giving everyone a chance to be happy,” Shadow states with a solemn look, “Even you.”

Zero shakes his head and laughs, “Such a waste.” He rolls his eyes and begins to make a circuit around Shadow.

“Was it?” Shadow’s eyes follow him patiently.

Zero eyes him suspiciously.

“You’re *strong*, Zero,” Shadow states, not breaking eye contact, “Stronger than you know and you’re only going to get stronger with time.”

Zero finds Shadow’s words comical, “You know how I feel about lying.”

“Am I lying?” Shadow asks as he places his hand on his chest, “After all, you made a god bleed.”

Zero stops in his tracks. He grits his teeth and lets his fist sail into the air at Shadow. He growls when Shadow catches it and he says, “I hate you, Shadow.”

Shadow frowns at that.

Zero shakes his head as a smirk appears on his face before sending his other fist in the same fashion, only to have it be blocked. “I hate that you actually make me feel good about myself,” Zero finishes before twisting his body up and grabbing Shadow’s arms, pulling him up and over with him.

Shadow catches his feet on the ground and grabs Zero’s arms back before slamming him hard into the ground. When he sees that Zero is motionless on the ground, he takes a step back, “Zero...?”

Zero lets out a breathless bout of laughter and slowly rolls over, “The pain feels good sometimes. It is exhilarating. It is better than feeling worthlessness or sadness. It is just a powerful surge to the system.”

Shadow leans down and holds his hand out to Zero.

Zero sees it and looks up into Shadow’s eyes for a moment before smirking. He takes it and allows himself to be pulled up. “I know you are stronger than this,” Zero says with a keen look, “Show me your real power, Shadow. I want to see the raw power of a god.”

Shadow sighs and looks away.

Zero shrugs and is about to walk off, “Was worth a shot.”

“You’re a madman, Zero,” Shadow tells him, a tinge of amusement in his voice.

Zero stops when he hears that and glances over his shoulder.

Shadow clicks each one of his inhibitors off, one-by-one before holding them out for Zero, “I kind of like that about you.”

Zero just stares at the inhibitors for a moment before actually taking them. He can feel the heat from the metal and watches as Shadow back off into the center of the room. The golden aura around him becomes visible as it whips and chars the room around him. Zero’s eyes widen in awe because he was actually going to see it. He was actually going to witness Shadow’s ultimate power.

“Chaos...” Shadow curls his hands into fists and pulls his limbs closer to his body. The aura stabilizes into a compact energy field around him as if it’s strictly at his command. It heats up and the golden aura turns into a molten red one. Shadow’s eyes open for a brief moment and his eyes are glowing like hot coals before releasing his arms out, “...Blast!”

The energy bursts out like a bomb going off and Zero is mesmerized by it before turning tail and running. He knows he can outrun it, but he can’t help but look back at the destruction it brings around him. He bursts out of a window, the glass breaking from the sheer force before he even gets to it and he lands on a streetlamp. He turns and watches as the energy bursts and explodes, the building giving way and crumbling apart. The fiery remains rain down around him, but he disregards it. He slips and loses his balance momentarily because he couldn’t be bothered to look away at the majesty in front of him.

Shadow’s form bursts through the rubble like pure brick and cinderblock is nothing and he lands on the asphalt street as it cracks under his feet. He stands tall as the building behind him erupts and



explodes before collapsing, sending a wave of dust down the city streets.

Zero hops down from the streetlight and lands next to Shadow. He says nothing and hands the inhibitors back to him.

Shadow nods back and takes them, clasping them back on.

Both of their heads turn when they hear sirens wailing and Zero grabs Shadow's hand, running down the alleyway howling with laughter.

Shadow can't help but feels a rush from it. His nerves are buzzing like electrical wires and his blood is pumping hot magma. He feels...*alive*.

Zero holds his hands together for Shadow and he motions his head up at the fire escape above him. Shadow nods and braces his foot in Zero's hands as he's boosted up. He grabs the metal railing and goes to hold his hand out to Zero, but Zero is leaping up and scaling it with ease.

"Come on, old man. If we stay much longer, the commander will be paying our bail," Zero says a bit snarky.

Shadow rolls his eyes and continues up. As they get to the top though, Shadow is in the lead as they jump the rooftops. They escape effortlessly.

Zero points at the Red Gate Bridge like it's a question and Shadow just nods back to him.

Once they finally reach the top, Zero lays back against the cold steel and looks up at the sky. A smile grows on his face as he says with envy, "Oh, how I wish I could have an ounce of that *power*."

Shadow just stands as he looks down at the cars traveling down the bridge. They're so small from here. "Not much you can do with it," Shadow responds absently.

"Whatever you say," Zero says, getting used to Shadow's modesty. He stares up at the sky, squinting to see the stars through the light pollution. "There is one thing I miss about my homeland," Zero whispers as he lifts his hand up like he can almost touch it, "The stars were so bright."

"Mh," Shadow nods like he knows what he means.

"I was stupid and young. I thought I could count all of the stars in the sky," Zero says with a bitter laugh, "I noticed very quickly that the canvas of the sky revealed more and more as time went on. I had asked my mother how many there were."

Shadow turns to look down at Zero and gives him his attention because he feels like this is a nostalgic memory he holds dear.

"She told me that there was no way to count them all. Some we could see and others we could not. That was just how the universe was. Endless and vast," Zero continues as he lets his hand fall down, "Those nights I felt small, microscopic in comparison."

That was a relatable feeling. He's had those same thoughts in the past. With the stars all around him in clear view most of his life, he's felt insignificant. He does remember Maria's words though.

"Perhaps you shouldn't view it in that regard. The universe may be big, but you are still here. Living. Against all odds you were brought into this world. In a way, that makes you resilient," Shadow says as if he's reciting those words.

Zero is silent as he takes in those words. His eyes don't leave the sky and his hair is like tendrils all around him. He hadn't thought of it in that way before. It was a new perspective. Dare he say, inspiring. He combs his sharp nails through his hair and says, "When put that way, I do not feel so worthless. I feel..." Zero trails off as if trying to put meaning into words.

"Infinite," Shadow murmurs back, eyes still on the sky above them.

Zero turns to Shadow like he's taken off guard by the statement. When he sees Shadow slowly rest his gaze upon him, he can see the genuine look in his eyes. Zero averts his gaze and chuckles under his breath, "Perhaps one day I will be deserving of that label."

That was a start. Hearing the little bit of hope in Zero's voice was all he really needed. Nothing else really needed to be said. The solace of darkness around them was comfort in itself. Although the sun would rise soon and the problems he's been avoiding would arise with it.

Shadow doesn't know why, but he finds comfort in Zero's presence. His home life was beginning to feel messy and complicated. He doesn't want to be the catalyst for a disaster there, but here... Zero was already messed up. Blemished by the world that had looked down at him. There was nothing more to corrupt. He was so desensitized by the pain he almost seeks pleasure from it. It's something that's been constant and familiar in his life. Shadow can't help, but relate to that.

Zero lets out a bitter laugh when he sees the sun breaking through the horizon, "Better get back to that family of yours. They will wonder where you are."

Shadow nods. He goes to step forward, but stops. He doesn't turn to Zero. He just says, "Don't feel discouraged from contacting me again."

Zero snickers, "That almost sounds like an invitation."

"Take what you will from it," Shadow states.

"Yeah, yeah..." Zero says dismissively as he lays back again and waves him off.

With that, Shadow leaves. It's quick, simple, and easy.

## Something's Off



### Chapter Twenty-One: Something's Off

Sonic wakes the next morning to his alarm and stretches. He rubs his eye as he looks down at the empty spot next to him. It's a clear indication Shadow hadn't come to bed last night. He frowns and pulls himself out of bed to make sure he isn't still in the garage.

To his surprise, Shadow is laying on the couch. He looks as though he'd passed out on it face first. Which is weird for Shadow's standards.

Sonic makes his way over and kneels down in front of him, "Shadow."

There's no answer. He's dead asleep. Shadow is always a light sleeper.

Sonic doesn't think too much of it though. He just covers him up with the nearest blanket and makes his way into the kitchen. He makes sure Silver has his breakfast and packs him a lunch before making his way out to drop him off for school.

Silver looks as devastated as he had the night prior. He looks out at the scenery that goes by before muttering, "I wish father never came home. He's just a burden on my life."

Sonic gives him a hurt look, "Don't say stuff like that, Silver."

"It's true," Silver says angrily, "He acts like he can come and go as he pleases and dictate my life. It's my life not his! He didn't even give Jet a chance!"

“Just let me talk to him. It was my fault. I didn’t explain any of this to him and I completely forgot about it when he came to pick you up,” Sonic tries to offer.

“Why do you do this!?” Silver shouts, “You always defend him! It isn’t your fault! He shouldn’t be acting like this! It’s not like you can control him!”

Sonic grips the steering wheel tighter and says, “There’s a lotta stuff you don’t understand, Silver.”

“I know enough,” Silver retorts with a huff, “Like, how father hates me and wants to suffocate me with his rules!”

“Shadow doesn’t hate you,” Sonic responds with a frown.

“You don’t treat me like he does. You let me live my life. You let me--!”

“I let you get away with a lotta stuff,” Sonic cuts him off suddenly, but it isn’t out of anger. It’s more so guilt. “I do it because I... I feel bad,” Sonic tells him.

Silver just looks at him like he’s expecting a joke, “For what?”

Sonic doesn’t say anything. He just stares straight ahead.

“For what? Tell me!” Silver demands, “What could you possibly feel bad for?! You love me and respect me and you have *always* been there for me!”

Sonic pulls over to the side of the road sudden and puts the car in park. He hunches over the steering wheel and tries to calm his breathing.

“Dad...?” Silver asks, clicking off his seat belt and crawling over the center counsel.

Sonic pulls him into his lap and holds him tightly, “I love you, okay? I love you more than anything in the world and that’s all you need to know.”

“I already love you, daddy,” Silver whispers, nuzzling closer in order to comfort him, “Nothing would ever change that.”

Sonic nods and places a kiss onto his forehead, “Thanks, Silvy.” He places the kid back into his seat and buckles him up, “Let’s get you to school, okay?”

“Alright,” Silver agrees and sits obediently for him.

The rest of the car ride is spent in silence.

-

Silver breathes a sigh of relief when he sees Jet settle into his seat. He was afraid he wasn’t going to show up. He felt the need to talk to him right away so he makes his way over to his desk before class starts.

“Jet, I wanted to apologize for...” Silver starts to say.

Jet just looks him up and down before asking, “Ew. Why are you talking to me, loser?”

Silver blinks at him. He gives him a confused look.

“Are you lost or something? Your desk is over there, weird-o,” Jet says as he points to the other side

of the room.

Silver can hear the other kids laughing, but he doesn't really care. "No, really. I'm sorry about what happened yesterday," Silver tries to explain.

"What are you talking about? I didn't see you yesterday. Why would I hang out with a *loser* like you? Don't waste my time," Jet responds dismissively and waves his hand like he's done talking to him.

Silver's face drops. Jet was just pretending like it all never actually happened. He's so convincing that Silver almost questions if it happened.

He doesn't get another word in because Mrs. Labyrinth walks into the room and says, "Everyone to their seats. Class will begin shortly."

Silver stares at Jet, but he isn't even looking at him anymore. He's pretending like he doesn't even exist. Silver balls his fists and turns away to go sit back down. He wouldn't stand for this. This wasn't right and he knew it.

He would wait until after school got out to talk to him properly.

-

Waiting for Shadow to wake up was agony for Sonic. He paces back and forth in front of him. He does the dishes as noisily as he possibly can. And he ends up playing video games while laying on Shadow's legs because he gets fed up with waiting.

He wouldn't usually be this antsy, but Shadow's words from yesterday about wanting to talk to him were making his anxiety levels go through the roof. At this point, he just wants the conversation done and over with.

Shadow does finally start shifting awake when he feels that his legs had painfully fallen asleep due to the blood circulation being cut off. He shimmies his legs out from under Sonic and groans as he tries to open his eyes. They feel dry and dirty from last night.

"Good morning, sleepyhead," Sonic says a little condescending, "Or should I say *afternoon*."

"What time is it?" Shadow asks as if he's trying to get his bearings of where he is.

"Two o'clock," Sonic snickers, "and I thought *I* slept in late."

Shadow rubs his head and curses himself. He only planned on taking a short nap. It was rather embarrassing. Although there's the weight on his body that has been lifted somehow.

"You wanted to talk to me," Sonic says as the chime of the pause screen comes from the TV and he sets the controller aside.

Shadow had. He had many things to speak of. All of those things seem to be far away from him against a fog in his mind. Shadow pulls himself up to sit and his body is still heavy with sleep like he could sleep another four hours easily. He resists it though.

"You okay?" Sonic asks because he's kind of concerned by how Shadow's acting.

Shadow nods before getting to his feet. He looks down at Sonic, but his eyes aren't rage filled. They're more relaxed and calm. "You're welcome to your secrets," Shadow states before making his

way into the kitchen.

Sonic eyes widen when he hears that and he frantically climbs over the coffee table, following after him, “W-w-wait, *what!?*” Shadow has never said that to him. He’s always wanted to know everything about him. What bothers him. What hurts him. Always skeptical about hidden meanings in his actions. He doesn’t mean to panic, but it’s just so foreign for him.

Shadow places a filter into the coffee machine and scoops the grounds into it. “Yes,” Shadow confirms, “We are keeping things from Silver... it’s only fair.” He presses a few buttons and waits for the machine to kick in.

Sonic pushes Shadow against the counter and presses his palm against his forehead to make sure he isn’t running a fever or something, “Am I talking to the same guy who threatened a kid and broke his hover board yesterday!?”

“I overreacted,” Shadow murmurs.

Sonic just looks at Shadow like there has to be more. When Shadow doesn’t move, Sonic shakes his head like he isn’t going to accept that, “No way, dude! You’re supposed to tell me to not keep secrets from you! You’re supposed to tell me that Silver shouldn’t hang out with Jet because it’ll trigger his powers! You’re supposed to tell me that it’s my job to keep him safe and I’ve been doing a terrible job at it!”

Shadow places a gentle hand on Sonic’s face before saying, “I’m being too hard on you.”

Sonic moves away from his touch, officially weirded out, “Who *are* you!?”

Shadow just stares back at him.

“You have to be my impulse control, Shadow,” Sonic tells him a little distressed, “I don’t know what I’m doing with Silver.”

“Just calm down,” Shadow says.

Sonic takes a few steps back before shaking his head. He slowly reaches for his keys and heads for the door, “I need to like... get some air or something.”

Shadow hears the front door shut and he sighs at that.

Was he truly acting that weird?

-

There’s a delightful ding when Sonic enters the small café and Amy greets him like she normally does. Luckily, the place is pretty empty for a weekday afternoon and Sonic makes his way to the counter.

“I have your order all ready for you,” Amy tells him and slips the plate onto the counter.

Sonic looks down at it with a raised eyebrow. This usually happens on slow days when he walks in. It’s almost like she *knows* he’s coming or something. “Uh... thanks,” Sonic says taking it and walking off to a table, “Just like... put it on my tab or something.” He doesn’t actually have one. That’s just their own way of saying that he isn’t paying today.

Amy just giggles at him, “Oh, so you aren’t going to act all disgusted with me today?”

“Shut up, Ames. I’m havin’ my own issues right now,” Sonic responds as he plops down in one of the colorful booths. His grumpy nature perfectly juxtaposing with the bright, frilly environment around him.

Amy takes the liberty to walk from behind the counter to the floor in her little pink apron, “So, are you going to finally admit we’re BFFs?”

Sonic just gives her a stale look and mutters, “Wanna fight Knux for that title? Because like... I think he’s in the process of making friendship bracelets and it’d break his little heart.”

“Knuckles...the echidna is best friends with Sonic the Hedgehog?” Amy asks with a snorted laugh.

Sonic just rolls his eyes and takes a big bite of his dessert.

Amy takes a seat next to Sonic and smiles at how he scoots a considerable distance away from her. She’s just used to it by now though. “So, why aren’t you here with Shadow? I heard he was back,” she questions.

“None of your business,” Sonic says, jabbing his fork in the space between them.

“Did you get into a fight?” Amy asks curiously.

Sonic sighs as if he’s caving. “No. No, we didn’t,” Sonic finally says, “but that’s the problem.”

“Um... okay?” Amy asks more than says as if it’s a joke.

“He’s the responsible one. He’s supposed to put me in my place,” Sonic says with anger, “He’s not supposed to be all like ‘Just calm down.’ *‘Just calm down!’* I can’t even imagine him saying that out loud! Him... telling *me* to calm down! I’m *cool!* I am the definition of chill! I’m always relaxed! I’m so cool that...” Sonic wraps his arms around himself and asks, “Is it like... cold in here? Can you turn the AC off or something?”

Amy just blinks at him. She glances up at one of the vents and there isn’t even any air coming out of it. It seems like a comfortable temperature. She disregards it and tries to say, “I think that’s just his way of saying he’s sorry. Look, I’m not going to get into your business or anything, but maybe he feels bad for what he’s done.”

“I know and I’d totally agree with you, but... He’s being weird about it,” Sonic explains as he taps his fork against his plate repeatedly, “Usually he blows up on me. Tells me all the stuff I did wrong. I tell him to calm down and he’s overreacting. Then, everything is better. No, instead he took a whole night before even talking to me about it and then calmly approached me *later!* Who *does* that?”

Amy raises an eyebrow at him, “Um... Sonic, you do realize that’s the healthy route, right?”

“Let me level with you a sec,” Sonic says as he points down at his dessert, “I eat this every day. You seriously think I give a crap about healthy?”

Amy rolls her eyes at him, “He probably doesn’t want to hurt you. He just got back, ya know?”

Sonic pouts, folding his arms on the table and resting his chin on them. “I’m hurt when he’s not there. That’s what hurts. Not him being there and being Shadow. Yeah, he overreacted and went overboard yesterday, but I’d take that over him hiding away all night and avoiding me.”

Amy gives him big, watery eyes, “Oh, Sonic. That’s adorable!”

Sonic holds his fork up to her like it's a weapon.

"I think you need to tell Shadow how you feel," Amy suggests.

"You *always* suggest that," Sonic responds with a look of disgust.

"And how many times am I wrong?" Amy asks with a cutesy tone.

It physically pains Sonic to respond with, "...None."

"Good," she pats his shoulder and stands up again as she sees a customer walk in, "Now, go talk about your feelings and come back if you need any more advice."

Sonic watches her go before resting his forehead against the table and complaining loudly, "Ughhhhh! This is the *worst!*"

-

Silver makes sure to have all of his belongings packed *before* the bell rings. And when it does, he gets up and makes his way out the door before everyone else. He waits for Jet to get out and once he does, he grabs him by the wrist and pulls him down the hallway with him.

"Let go of me!" Jet shouts, trying to struggle out of his grip.

"No, we're talking!" Silver says back, stomping with each footfall.

"I don't wanna talk to you!" Jet responds, trying to pry Silver's steel grip off of him.

Silver brings Jet down one of the dead end hallways and ducks him under the water fountain so no one can see him. Silver just stands and keeps watch.

"What are you doing!?" Jet asks with anger.

"I'm hiding you so no one knows you're with me and once everyone leaves I want to talk," Silver responds as he folds his arms across his chest and waits impatiently for the kids to file out.

Jet gives Silver a sad look, but stays quiet.

Once he sees the last of them leave, Silver rests his hand on the top of the water fountain and kneels down in front of Jet. "I know you're being mean to me again because you're mad about what happened. I'm sorry it happened like that. I should have defended you it's just that..."

"What!?" Jet squawks out in disbelief, "No, that's not...!" He lets out an aggravated noise before getting his thoughts straightened out, "I'm bullying you so you'll get mad at me again and want me to leave you alone."

Silver gives him a confused look, "Why?"

"I'm not worth hanging out with if you're gonna get in trouble," Jet exclaims.

"Of course you are. I'm your friend," Silver says with a frown, "right?"

Jet's eyes veer away.

"Well, you're *my* friend," Silver responds with more confidence, "and you're worth it."



"I've been nothing, but mean to you, Silver," Jet says shamefully.

"So have I," Silver tells him sternly, "I was the one who attacked you, remember?"

"You wouldn't have done that if I..."

Silver doesn't let him finish, "No, Jet. I'm responsible for my own actions. I decided to do that and it was wrong. I acknowledge my mistake and I'm going to learn from it. You can do the same. We just need to have integrity." Silver holds his hand out to Jet and gives him a broad smile.

Jet is hesitant though. He doesn't know what to do.

Silver doesn't give him the choice though. He's pulling Jet onto his feet again.

Jet stumbles forward, but retreats backward a little. He looks away embarrassed, but in a way he's happy he hadn't completely lost Silver's friendship. "H-how much trouble are you in?" Jet asks nervously.

Silver gives him a sad smile and says, "My father said that if he finds me with you again that he'll take me out of school."

Jet pales when he hears that.

Silver gives him a small wink though, "We just have to make sure he doesn't see us together that's all."

Jet doesn't look too sure.

"How's your board?" Silver asks with concern.

"Trashed," Jet says with a sigh, "I had Wave come pick me up with her board."

Silver cringes when he hears that, "Sorry... My uncle might be able to fix it."

Jet shakes his head, "No, don't worry. My sis can fix it no problem."

Silver just nods to him, "Want to hang out for a little bit?"

"No offense," Jet says a little nervously, "but I think I'll wait for your father to go back to work first."

Silver looks down at his feet sadly.

"But," Jet says trying to bring up his spirits, "You've gotten pretty good. I wouldn't mind racing you again at recess after my board is all fixed up."

Silver's face shines with happiness, "Really?"

Jet nods, regaining some of his confidence. He smacks the back of his hand against Silver's forehead teasingly, "Yeah, I look forward to it."

Silver giggles a little at the playful gesture. He smacks Jet's arm in return, "Nice."

They stand a bit awkwardly, not really knowing what to say next.

"So, uh... Yeah, I'll see you then," Jet responds as he's backing up and pointing his fingers at Silver.

He quickly rushes away after that.

Silver is just laughing at him because he's such a nerd sometimes. He gives Jet ample time for his 'escape' before makes his way down to the exit himself. He sees the car parked where it usually is and starts heading toward it in dread.

As he gets closer, the window rolls down and almost gives him a heart attack.

It's Sonic though, "Don't worry. Just me today."

Silver breathes a sigh of relief and makes his way around to the passenger's seat. He's surprised to see Shadow hadn't demanded on coming with, but Silver can smell the aroma of pastries and is guessing Sonic snuck out of the house to Amy's café before coming here. Either way, he's just glad to have a peaceful ride home.

Although he's not expecting a peaceful night as well. Shadow doesn't even bat an eyelash when Silver and Sonic play video games really loudly. He just kind of seems like he's in his own head. Distracted. Daydreaming.

It's kind of strange, but Silver isn't going to question it because it's nice and quiet now.

Sonic was going to wait until that night to talk to Shadow, but Shadow is asleep before even Silver is. Now, he's just kind of laying in bed wondering if he should be worried. Nothing was *wrong* per say, but it wasn't normal either.

So, he settles down and tries to go to sleep.

# Loyalty



## Chapter Twenty-Two: Loyalty

Like clockwork, 3 o'clock rolls around and Shadow's phone is vibrating across the nightstand. He doesn't wake up until he hears it fall onto the floor. He reaches for it and murmurs softly, "Hello?"

"Tag, you're it," Zero snickers into the receiver before it goes dead.

Shadow blinks his eyes open and stares at the screen. He sighs and carefully pulls himself out of bed. He looks over at Sonic who is turned away on his side and makes his way out of the bedroom and down the stairs. He traces the call and grumbles because it's somewhere deep in Westopolis. A part he barely recognizes.

He makes sure his inhibitors are secure around his shoes before reaching for the door.

"Um..."

Shadow stops and winces. He slowly turns around and sees Sonic on the staircase.

Sonic gives him a nervous laugh, "Where... uh... Where're you goin', Shads?"

Shadow faces the door again and silently curses to himself. He just mumbles, "I have something I need to take care of."

"At uh..." Sonic cranes his head to see the time on the stove top, "3 in the morning?"

“Yes,” Shadow says back with a bite to his voice.

Sonic surprisingly has no idea how to respond to that. Whatever it was, it must be important, right? This is Shadow he’s talking to. He doesn’t know why, but he just says, “Alright. Yeah, cool. I’ll see you in the morning, I guess.”

For some reason, he’s expecting Shadow to turn around and explain himself, but Shadow just opens the door and disappears behind it. Sonic feels really...strange. Like, defeated and sad. He can’t really explain it. So, he just goes back upstairs and back to bed.

He keeps his phone near him in case Shadow calls and Sonic falls asleep an hour later. He’s hoping the phone will vibrate and wake him up, but it never does.

Instead, he wakes up to his alarm and the sun is shining through the blinds. He quickly darts up and rushes down the stairs. He finds Shadow passed out on the couch the exact same way he had the night before.

He doesn’t know why, but his chest is thundering with panic.

“Dad...?” Silver asks sleepily.

“Hey, kiddo! Hey! Hi!” Sonic says, way too enthusiastic for his own good. He picks up Silver by the armpits and carts him over to the kitchen, “What kinda cereal do you want?”

Silver is squinting at Sonic through his tired eyes, wondering what the heck is going on, “Dad, calm down.”

“I *am* calm,” Sonic says defensively, “I’m totally calm! What makes you think I’m not calm!?”

“Uh...” Silver just stares at Sonic blankly.

Sonic places Silver in the chair and shuffles through the various cereal boxes, mumbling angrily about *being calm*.

Silver looks from Sonic to Shadow, wondering if he just entered the twilight zone or something.

The week goes by in a similar fashion. Silver talks to Jet in private. Shadow goes out at night. And Sonic is trying not to be a nervous wreck.

When the weekend comes, Sonic tries to suggest their outing to the amusement park and neither Silver nor Shadow seems interested. Silver just continues to play video games and Shadow is gazing out the window, his laptop has been in sleep mode for a half hour now.

He feels weirdly detached and cold. It has to be his own imagination.

-

Amy hums happily as she opens the door to her café. She gasps when there’s a sharp wind and a blur of blue. She makes her way inside and turns on the lights, “Sonic, why are you here? I haven’t even opened up shop.” She turns to lock the front door behind her.

“I know, I know,” Sonic responds, pulling at his quills a little, “I’m just kinda freaking out a little.”

She raises an eyebrow at him, but offers him a seat, “Need to talk about it?”

Sonic just gives her a grateful look as he sits down and his knee is bouncing like crazy, “I can’t

explain it.”

Amy is surprised by how distressed he is. She feels kind of bad. So, she disappears in back and makes him a plate of his favorite treat.

Sonic just slides it away, “I can’t, dude. I feel really sick right now.”

That is a huge red flag for her. She sits down next to him and places a hand on his shoulder, “Talk to me, Sonic.”

“I think I really messed up this time,” Sonic responds with his face in his hands, “Silver had this little friend Jet and he’s like the same Jet that pushed Silver over the edge that one time. And Shadow totally blamed me for being stupid because I exploited my fame to have him watch Silver during preschool. And like, they became friends later and I kept it a secret from Shadow. And then, Shadow picked Silver up on his day off and I totally blanked and he saw them walking together and he got royally pissed. But then like... he didn’t chew me out for it and now he’s acting all weird and calm and, and...”

Amy rubs his back and says, “Sonic, breathe.”

“You’re always right, right?” Sonic turns to her and asks.

“I mean... I guess?” She says with a shrug.

Sonic takes a breath and composes himself before turning to Amy, looking her dead in the face, “If your spouse constantly leaves in the middle of the night, what does that mean?”

“Wait, what!?” Amy asks in confusion, “What do you mean?”

“I dunno? I’m probably thinking too much into it, but...”

“Sonic,” Amy states with a serious face, “Is Shadow cheating on you?”

Sonic just stares back at Amy for a long moment before bursting into laughter. “Shadow? Cheat on *me*? That’s a good one,” Sonic responds comically, “He’s completely loyal.” Sonic doesn’t see Amy’s face change though and his smile falters a little, “This is where you agree with me, Ames. You’re supposed to tell me that Shadow would never do that and he’s super loyal and has a heart of gold or whatever it is you usually say.”

“Sonic...” Amy whispers with a sad tone.

Sonic grabs her shoulders and shakes her a little, “C’mon, Amy! Tell me I’m thinking too much into this!”

She just gives him a brokenhearted look and opens her arms to him, “Sonic, I’m sorry.”

He’s in complete shock. His hands slide off her shoulders and fall to his sides limply. “I can’t lose him...”

She scoots in closer and guides his face to her shoulder, pulling him into a tight hug.

Sonic doesn’t move.

“You’re going to be okay,” Amy tells him.

“I’m gunna lose everything,” Sonic whispers in alarm, “I don’t have a stable job. I’m gunna lose the

house. I'm... Oh fuck, I'm gunna lose custody of *Silver*."

Amy doesn't know what to tell him. She just does her best to comfort him.

Sonic pulls away for a moment to look her in the eyes. Tears begin to drip down his face and he says in a shaky tone, "That's why Shadow doesn't want to talk this out. He's planning on leaving me. So, fighting with me doesn't even matter anymore. He's just gunna kick me out. I've messed up too many times."

"This has nothing to do with you, Sonic," Amy says seriously, "You two are married and have a life together. He needs to communicate with you. You didn't mess any of this up."

"Silver... He said I was always there for him and..." Sonic presses his hand against his forehead as he tries to hold back tears, "and... I really wasn't. I completely abandoned him when he was a baby. I have no right to be a dad. I don't even know what I'm doing."

"No, you're doing a wonderful job," Amy says in a reassuring manner, "Raising a kid isn't easy, but you've more than made up for it. You aren't that person anymore. You've changed. We all have."

"I haven't changed enough," Sonic murmurs quietly. He runs his hand through his quills and tries to go through all of the thoughts in his head before coming up short. "What should I do?" Sonic asks.

"I know you're tired of hearing this from me," Amy begins to say, "but I think you should talk to him. Get some answers. You have a right to know."

Sonic nods and slowly gets up. He makes his way to the door, but stops and turns to her. "Amy?" He asks with a small voice, "Can I have a hug?"

Amy just gives him a smile and makes her way over, wrapping her arms around him, "Good luck, Sonic."

Sonic buries his face into her shoulder and nods. He takes in a deep breath and straighten his posture.

She unlocks the door for him and lets him out. She watches him leave and hopes he'll be okay.

-

Sonic doesn't know why he's waiting until night to talk to Shadow. Probably just delaying the inevitable, but even then he can't. Even when the chance to talk to him is right there and Shadow is laying in bed checking his emails, he can't even bring himself to say anything.

He didn't think this would be so hard. Well, no, that's a lie. He didn't think he'd have to be dealing with this at all.

Who the heck was Shadow even seeing? Who was his type? Sonic is pretty sure the only one he's ever dated was *him*. Then again, that was sudden and impulsive.

"Are you alright?" Shadow asks, taking note of how he's just standing in the doorway fidgeting.

Sonic squints his eyes at him. *Is he alright?* Did he really have the nerve to ask him that right now? Of course he wasn't alright.

Still, Sonic crawls onto the bed and nuzzles into his side. He feels Shadow rubbing his thumb against his shoulder and it feels so comforting. He wants to pretend everything is normal. "We're alright, right?" Sonic asks softly.

There's a short pause.

Sonic physically winces at that.

"Yes," Shadow finally says.

Sonic feels his eyes welling with tears. He just wants Shadow to yell at him and tell him everything he's done wrong so he can try and fix it again. He doesn't want this to be it. He wants a second chance.

Sonic is hoping that small confirmation held some merit to it, but Sonic's eyes open the moment he hears Shadow's phone going off and he has to fight off the sour pit in his stomach as he feels Shadow leave. As he hears the front door close, he rolls over to Shadow's side and grips his pillow.

Why the hell was this happening to him?

-

Shadow sighs when he gets to Emerald Coast because he's going to be cleaning sand out of his shoes for weeks. Zero is standing next to the payphone this time. Shadow shakes his head at him and asks, "Here? Really?"

"What can I say," Zero responds as he slowly meets with Shadow, "I like long romantic walks on the beach."

Shadow just rolls his eyes at him, "Look, if you're not serious about this I should really be getting back."

Zero looks Shadow over as if he's trying to decipher a code, "Uh-oh. Is your hubby catching on to you?"

Shadow glares at him and states, "That's none of your concern."

"Of course not," Zero replies smugly, "Give him my regards then."

"Tsk..." Shadow folds his arms across his chest and gives him an impatient look. No, he would *not* tell Sonic about Zero. He didn't want him thinking what he was doing was anything GUN related. He was already worried as is.

"I can't keep doing this every night," Shadow informs him.

"Aw," Zero coos at him mockingly, "Is the old man getting tired? Keeping him up past his bedtime?"

Shadow rubs at inhibitors before explaining, "Joke all you want, but using all of this power so frequently is depleting my energy. So, yes. In a way, I'm getting tired."

Zero pouts his lip at him and begins to walk down to the shoreline, "Fine, whatever. I will allow you to get your beauty sleep."

Shadow decides to follow him anyway, "I want to know why you chose here of all places first."

"The dark, dingy streets have been fun. Destroying the very structures these humans used to reside in has been more than ironic," Zero remarks almost sounding seriously, "I yearn for the day nature takes back what is rightfully hers."

"I think you're completely missing the point of this," Shadow tries to argue.

"Am I?" Zero turns to Shadow, his yellow eye strikingly golden under the moonlight, "Are you not giving into your primal nature? Alleviating the part of you who is constantly resisting your urge to kill and destroy?"

"What are you talking about?" Shadow asks with confusion, "I've been helping you train. Helping you boost your self-esteem."

"Do not act like you have not found pleasure and relief in this," Zero responds with a smirk.

Shadow grits his teeth and turns away, "I'm going home."

Zero calls out to him regardless, "Omega is your destructive urges with no cognitive resistance, is he not?"

Shadow stops in his tracks. He doesn't say anything.

"Think about it, Shadow," Zero explains as he step-by-step makes his way over to Shadow's side, "He harbors your DNA in instinctive, animalistic form."

"How do you know so much about me?" Shadow asks cautiously, not even putting that together on his own.

"I have been studying you," Zero explains, "You are the reason I was able to survive. Overcome every trial I have been faced with."

Shadow glares at him from his peripheral vision, "You have no reason to do so anymore. You have a new life and a second chance. Focus your energy on that. A better home and a better living environment. It will clear your head."

Zero finds his words funny, "Compared to how I was living before, it's paradise. My plans are not to become domesticated. I will pave the road for a better future. My own vision a reality."

"Go home and rethink what you just said," Shadow says in an authoritative tone.

Zero looks confused for a moment, "I assure you, Shadow. I am seeing *very* clear." He moves in front of Shadow, walking backwards in time with him so he can make eye contact, "There is still an *imbalance* in the world. An uprising is in order. Otherwise, nothing will change."

"There is peace in the world," Shadow tells him, "An uprising will only disrupt that peace."

"There is peace for *humans*," Zero responds emphasizing his point, "Not us. They are a weak, greedy race that..."

"*Enough*," Shadow states sternly, stopping in his trek, "I came out here to help you and you've turned all of our training into some *mission* I never signed up for."

Zero stops with him and gives Shadow a grim look, "No, as I recall, you came out here initially to make sure I did not get myself into trouble."

"You're not a child," Shadow growls out, "You've gotten this far in life on your own."

"Barely," Zero grits out, getting into Shadow's face, "Everything I have accomplished, everything I have *earned* was because of you!"



“No,” Shadow shakes his head, “You did that. I had only just met you. Remember that.” Shadow walks past him and heads back toward the city.

“You are just going to leave!?” Zero shouts back at him in a rage. When he doesn’t see Shadow turn back around he kicks the sand under his feet into a dust cloud. “Fine! Go back to your coddled little life! Make pretend you are one of those humans! I know the truth!” Even still, Shadow doesn’t return and Zero falls to his knees.

The grains of sand under him. They almost feel like home.

-

Sonic holds the pillow closer to his chest. His breath hitches as he feels the hot tears pouring down his face. This weight is suffocating. He can’t breathe. His limbs feel heavy and cold.

He feels the bile rising in his throat and leans over to purge the contents from his body. He panics when all that comes out is crystal clear water.

Water. Overflowing. All around him. It rises up and he scoots toward the center of the bed. He kicks his feet as the water rises up to his bed and lick at his ankles.

“No,” Sonic shakes his head and holds his pillow closer, “No, no, no!”

Sonic jolts awake with a gasp and pants heavily. He feels around him frantically. It’s dry. There’s no water. It was all just a dream.

He tries to slow his breathing, but his head perks up when he hears the front door open. He turns to look at the clock.

4:15 am

Sonic rushes out of bed, slipping once, but catching himself as he makes a mad dash down the stairs. Taking two at a time, he gets to the bottom step and sees Shadow at the front door. He runs to him, taking his hand and getting on his knees.

“Please! I’ll do anything, Shadow,” Sonic begs frantically, “I’ll change, dude. I promise.”

Shadow just looks down at him with a dumbfounded look.

“I’ll be a better husband. I’ll be a better father,” Sonic continues to plea, holding Shadow’s hand to his forehead, “Please, I can’t live without you!”

Shadow can already feel a headache forming from whatever this is from. Shadow’s hand slips out of Sonic’s grip and he whispers, “Keep your voice down.” He points to the bathroom on the far side of the kitchen, next to where the garage meets, as he begins to take off his shoes.

Sonic swallows and nods, walking into the bathroom. He doesn’t really want to look at his reflection in the mirror.

Shadow arrives a moment later and carefully shuts the door behind him, “What has gotten into you?”

Sonic glares at the ground. How can Shadow keep playing dumb with him? It was aggravating.

“Look, I get that you think I’m stupid, but I’m not *that* stupid. I know you’ve been sneaking out every night,” Sonic tries to not make his voice too shaky. He struggles to remember Amy’s words, but everything is getting all muddled together. Instead, he just demands, “I want answers, Shadow!”

At least tell me who you're seeing! I have a right to know!"

Shadow just sighs and looks away, shaking his head.

Sonic taps his foot impatiently, but stops when he notices something. He pushes Shadow against the sink and reaches behind his head.

"Get off me!" Shadow demands, fighting him back.

Sonic keeps reaching though and grabs it. It's a strand of stark white hair clearly visible against Shadow's ebony quills. He slowly pulls it out and asks, "Who's hair is this!?" Sonic looks baffled because he keeps pulling and pulling and it's really, really long. "What the heck? Why is it so long?" Sonic asks in horror before it finally gives and springs into flowing waves, "Is it curly!? Is this a *woman's* hair!?"

Shadow doesn't understand what he's getting at.

"Dude, if you're bi-curious and you're testing out the waters, just tell me. I'd be fine with that," Sonic goes on as he paces back and forth as he continues to look over the strand of hair.

"Sonic."

"No, no! It's cool. I understand. Just... ya know, come back to me. I'm totally fine with it. Like, you never got a chance to experience a relationship with a woman..." Sonic goes on to say.

Shadow groans and rubs at his temples, "Sonic, I'm seeing *Zero*."

Sonic gasps and takes a step back, "Your partner with GUN? You're seeing someone *younger* than me?"

"Sonic, you're immortal."

"But I've aged *mentally*," Sonic retorts over-dramatically.

"That's..." Shadow stops and says with a stale tone, "That's debatable."

"I still have my youth, Shadow!"

Shadow grits his teeth and thrusts Sonic onto the lid of the toilet seat, "Sit down." Shadow leans against the counter like he's exhausted as is. "If you're, in your twisted mind, insinuating that I am cheating on you with Zero, then let me put your petty fears to rest. That is not the case," he explains like this is the most tedious thing he's ever had to clear up in his life. Shadow tries to quell his anger enough to calmly explain, "Ever since our last mission, Zero has been...unstable. I have been trying to work with him, so that if a similar situation were to arise in any future missions he would be prepared for it. Thus far, he has a lot to learn."

Sonic just blinks up at Shadow, the dampness still in his eyes. He looks down at the ground and feels really, really stupid. He buries his face in his hands and feels a mixture of relief and shame for even questioning Shadow's loyalty.

Shadow glances over at Sonic and frowns when he sees his hunched form. His eyes soften and he makes his way over, kneeling in front of him. "Did you really think I was seeing someone else?" Shadow questions genuinely this time.

"I mean..." Sonic wipes his eyes clear of tears and sniffs before shrugging.

Shadow frowns at that. He rethinks the past week and how Sonic must have been silently agonizing over this. "Sonic," Shadow murmurs regretfully, "I didn't tell you because I was afraid you'd think this had something to do with GUN. I knew how hurt you were when I left you behind. If I'd realized not telling you would worry you more, I would have..."

Sonic smiles sadly at him, "That sounds more like you..."

Shadow holds up his left hand to him and vows, "I made a promise to you. I will never break that. I am only loyal to you."

Sonic rests his hand against Shadow's. As his smile widens the tears begin to fall, "That *definitely* sounds like you."

Shadow leans up and kisses Sonic's hand. He slowly trails them up his arm, to his neck, and then finally resting against his lips. He holds it there before wiping Sonic's tears away and kisses each one of his eyelids. He pulls back just enough to look him in the eye and whispers, "I love you."

Sonic's smile is in full bloom before he wraps his arms around Shadow's neck and presses a kiss onto his lips.

Shadow braces his hands on Sonic's hips to stabilize him and he lets their lips slide together and apart comfortably. "You're a loving husband," Shadow murmurs as he kisses him once more. "An excellent father," Shadow continues as he presses another kiss to his lips. "And I'm very lucky to have you," Shadow finishes as he lets their lips meld together deeper.

Sonic can't help, but feel his chest warm with those words. That's all he's ever wanted to hear. He presses closer to Shadow and intensifies the kiss. He opens his mouth wider and welcomes Shadow's tongue. He meets his with it and it's a comfortable lull of damp warmth as they make circuits around one another.

Shadow falls back a little when he feels Sonic climbing into his lap. His back meets the wall and he groans when Sonic's hips meet his. He pulls their mouths away with a wet noise and looks up at Sonic with a hungry look, "Is your intention to rile me up?"

Sonic bites his lip when he looks down at Shadow and a smile fights at the corners of his lips, "I wasn't trying to, but if you keep lookin' at me like *that* that might change."

Shadow is wagering it will. He holds Sonic tenderly for a moment before pressing a firm kiss onto Sonic's lips and guides him away. Sonic gives him a confused look, but Shadow places a finger to his lips before getting up. He makes his way over to the door and locks it before completely bypassing him to move toward the shower.

Sonic is just raising an eyebrow at him and he pulls himself onto his feet when he hears the trickling spray of water. "Um... What're you doing?"

Shadow just smirks at him and disappears behind the curtain.

Sonic feels himself being lured in. Once he gets inside, Shadow is already grabbing him by the arms and pulling him into a kiss. It's hot and ravenous and Sonic moans as Shadow nips at his bottom lip. Oh, that's why they're in the shower. To muffle their noises.

"It's come to my attention that I haven't been treating you as well as I should be," Shadow murmurs against Sonic's lips as a hand trails down his back.

"That's not what I meant..." Sonic tries to say sheepishly.

“No,” Shadow whispers back, “I want to prove my love to you. So you’ll never be compelled to question it again.”

“Um... okay,” Sonic swallows thickly because Shadow’s eyes are an all-consuming fire, warming his body almost like a physical touch. He feels Shadow trailing kisses down his chest to his abdomen. Sonic lifts his hand and rests it against Shadow’s head, rubbing in encouraging gestures with each slide of his lips and tongue that touch his body. He gasps when he feels Shadow’s hands slide down lower against his back. “You don’t have to...” Sonic begins to say before his breath catches in his throat, “O-oh...”

Shadow’s smirk widens against Sonic’s lower stomach because he had just slipped one finger into Sonic’s tight heat. “I must,” Shadow responds as he sinks his teeth into his flesh teasingly.

He loves how dutifully Shadow is acting. It’s kind of hot. It’s almost submissive in a way. He doesn’t really know how to describe it.

Or so he thinks until Shadow murmurs, “I bow to no one, but you.”

Sonic feels his whole face flare up as he pants for air, “Shadow... *Don’t.*”

Shadow licks up Sonic’s member, savoring the pearly white precum gathering at his slit. He swallows and hums out a pleased noise, the flavor igniting his taste buds. His eyes slowly open once more and gives Sonic a look of pure desire, “....my king.”

Sonic feels his insides melting to mush just from the look alone. He knows what he’s doing now. He doesn’t know how he feels about it.

Shadow sees the concerned look on Sonic’s face and he smirks, “Just play along.”

“Are you actually enjoying this?” Sonic asks with a skeptical look.

Shadow nuzzles into Sonic’s thigh and feels the muscle go taut when he slips in a second finger. “Oh, yes,” Shadow murmurs as his lips and tongue glide up the base of Sonic until he sinks down on the head, giving the slit one more generous lick. He pulls away and licks his lips before finishing, “It’s barely playing when I already worship your body.”

“Fff-uuh—“ Sonic bites his lip and stifles a moan. Everything is over stimulating. He is never, ever going to question Shadow’s loyalty again. Especially with him on his knees before him. He usually isn’t into stuff like this, but this is Shadow so it’s always the exception to the rule. He makes everything so *hot*.

Shadow takes Sonic’s reaction as a good sign and sinks down on his member fully this time. Up until the blunt end hits the back of his throat. He hums in pleasure and lets his lips slide around Sonic’s girth as he bobs his head in time. His fingers curl inside Sonic as he messages the sensitive bundle of nerves within him and gets a delightful spurt against his tongue.

Sonic is trying and failing to not lose his mind over this. Shadow was giving him so much attention right now. Sonic is cupping his hand over his mouth to stop the desperate noises from spilling out, but it so good. He’s gripping onto anything on the slippery tile wall and settles with the showerhead to keep himself upright as his knees threaten to buckle.

Pleased with the result he’s gotten, Shadow takes Sonic in deeper. He grasps onto the other’s thigh and allows Sonic to use his head to brace himself with. He stares up at the wild mess that is Sonic and can’t help the slight pull of his lips that threaten a smirk around his member. Shadow twists his fingers in a bit deeper, spreading them out as the quivering walls stretch around them. Shadow can

tell by the desperate pull inward that Sonic's body wants it. If that's the case, Shadow is more than willing to provide.

Shadow retreats his mouth from Sonic's member to give him some time to recover. "Is this all you require," Shadow asks obediently before giving Sonic a dark look and finishing, "my master."

Sonic gasps and stifles his moan, but it doesn't refrain him from losing it a bit. "Shadow, don't say stuff like that," Sonic says, clearly embarrassed.

"Why?" Shadow asks as he wipes the small bit precum that had spurt out from his comment with his thumb and licking flavor of it generously, "It would appear you like this treatment."

Sonic's face burns with humiliation.

Shadow gets to his feet once more and looms in close to whisper into his ear, "Tell me what you desire." Shadow's fingers stretch further as he applies a third, licking his lips at how the muscle pulses around them, "I have no quarrel with giving you what you want."

Shadow grits his teeth in a smirk when he feels Sonic's hand trail down his body and he sighs out his nose when he finally feels Sonic's hand wrap around his base. He doesn't make a move though. He waits for Sonic's command.

Sonic looks away like he's upset he has to ask. He glares at Shadow before pulling him into a rough kiss. The way Shadow's fingers are pressed firmly against his prostate is going to make him come undone prematurely. He knows what Shadow's doing and it's infuriating. "C'mon, Shadow! Fuck me already," Sonic demands irritably.

Sonic's lips stifle the chuckle coming from his throat and he pulls away from Sonic's angry lips, "Of course, my king." He revels in the heated look Sonic is giving him. He pulls his fingers out and wraps his arm around Sonic's waist knowing he'll buckle from the sudden motion. He pushes him up against the tiled wall and marvels in the sight of Sonic's legs apart, practically begging him to continue.

Shadow reaches around Sonic's front and wraps his fingers around the base of his cock. He hears Sonic begin to protest the action, but Shadow pushes in the moment he does effectively silencing him. He feels Sonic strain and Shadow smirks, holding Sonic in a firmer grip so he won't lose it immediately.

Sonic pants and looks down at Shadow's hand. Shadow had stopped him from cumming right on the spot. It wasn't just a cocky ploy and he's kind of thankful for that.

"Tell me when," Shadow murmurs against his shoulder and kisses and nips the spot.

Sonic takes a moment to breathe before nodding, "Okay."

Shadow nods back before he begins to move. His hand pumps in time with his hips as he buries himself deeper into Sonic's fluttering walls.

Sonic takes him by surprise and leans against him, head in the crook of his neck as he takes him in wholly.

Shadow sees the blissful look on Sonic's face and nuzzles into his neck in an adoring manner, "You like that?"

"Yeah," Sonic says shamelessly. His legs tremble as Shadow continues to thrust into him, each time

causing him to weep more and more down Shadow's fingers.

Shadow eyes it hungrily, but keeps his focus on the task at hand.

Sonic's hand surges up and grips the side of Shadow's face. "Harder," Sonic snarls desperately, "*Faster.*"

Shadow bites his lip because he really enjoys how demanding he's getting. "Whatever you desire," Shadow responds as he snaps his hips forward with more force. He can practically feel Sonic unwinding around him and he presses his face closer to Sonic's, whispering in a sultry voice, "*My king.*"

"Ah!" Sonic's shout gets cut off by his own throat closing up into a silent scream. The coil that's been winding up in his abdomen releases and he cums in a hectic mess of movements. He pulls Shadow's face closer to him and they exchange the best kiss they can muster given the position they're in. Shadow makes up for most of it by sliding his tongue against Sonic's and biting his slack lips.

Shadow buries himself within Sonic's quivering walls and lets go. He thrusts his hips faster to milk himself out of his orgasm as his hand does that same for Sonic. Shadow nuzzles into Sonic's neck with one final snap of his hips and he takes a moment to catch his breath. He carefully slides out and pulls Sonic around and into his arms, holding him tight. He guides them under the spray of water and assists with cleaning his partner off.

Sonic stays where he is, feeling Shadow's gentle hands assisting him. He feels safe and protected in his arms. He cuddles closer to Shadow's shoulder and murmurs, "I won't do it anymore."

Shadow just gives him a questioning tone as if he doesn't understand what he means as he briskly finishes his task.

Sonic lifts his arms up and holds onto Shadow's back, "The flirting. It's gunna stop. I realize just how bad it must have felt."

Shadow is silent for a moment before informing, "That was never my intention."

"No, I know," Sonic whispers solemnly, "This just opened my eyes is all."

Shadow feels a smile pull at his lips, "Well... Thank you."

"I'm yours," Sonic tells him a bit more confidently, "I mean that."

Shadow's smile widens slightly and he holds him closer, "And I am yours."

Sonic nods back and strangely feels at peace with himself. Everything itching at him before seems to have gone away. It was nice.

Shadow guides him out of the shower and they dry off. Shadow is somehow compelled to carry him up the stairs into their bedroom bridal style, never failing to mention how that's the first thing he'd done when they first gotten the house. Sonic is still kicking himself for being asleep and having something so cliché happen.

He doesn't hold onto that thought though as they crawl into bed. They nestle in close together, not leaving any room in between them before falling asleep.

## Born Ready



### Chapter Twenty-Three: Born Ready

The next morning, the three go to the *Rose Café* on Silver's request this time. No one is really against it either, so they go. Lo and behold, Blaze is there accompanied by Marine. So, there was an actual reason why he wanted to go. Silver is kind of sneaky like that.

When they get to the counter, they order the usual. Plus a chocolate cake a la mode for Silver. Silver's eyes sparkle when Amy offers him chocolate sprinkles as a garnish and the kid takes it excitedly, rushing over to the table Blaze and Marine are at.

"Silver," Shadow scolds him, "It's rude to leave before we've even paid for it."

Sonic stops him, "It's cool. I've got it." Sonic slaps some money down and shoots Amy some finger guns, "Keep the change."

Amy is baffled by Sonic's behavior, but nods her head silently like she doesn't know what to say. She watches them leave to grab a separate booth and she feels something folded within the bills. A small piece of jewelry slips out and she gasps because it's a friendship bracelet. There's a small note that reads: '*So yeah... I was thinking too much into it. Thanks for being there for me. ...or whatever.*' She gives Sonic an exasperated look as she hooks it around her wrist with a smile.

"Since when do you have money?" Shadow asks suspiciously.

"Since.... *This*," Sonic states as he unfolds some papers from his jacket pocket and spreads them across the table.

“This is a contract,” Shadow confirms, not really following.

“Yeah... I was gunna make it a surprise, but I’m bad with money. So, like... I need your help,” Sonic explains a little nervously.

“What did you do now?” Shadow asks a bit accusingly.

“Nothing,” Sonic says defensively before retreating, “Well, okay. That’s a lie, but...” He can see Shadow’s glare hardening on him. “Just let me explain, okay?” Sonic says with a sigh. He pulls out an envelope and slowly slides it in front of Shadow, “I signed a contract with a cola company. My name. My design. I had like... complete control over the advertising.”

Shadow grabs the contract and reads it over spastically, “What the *hell* compelled you to do this without my consent!?”

“Dude, chill. I talked to these stuffy guys in suits and they reassured me I was getting the majority of the profits or whatever,” Sonic explains, “Besides, the contract is expired now. Meaning, I don’t haveta do jack anymore.”

Shadow just shakes his head because what could he even say. Whatever was done was done by now. “So, why do you need my aid?”

“I don’t have a checking account,” Sonic says sheepishly as he points at the envelope, “And I promised all the assets would go to Silver. So, I like... need you to make an account for him because the one guy told me he can accumulate this stuff called *interest* until Silver is eighteen.”

Shadow raises an eyebrow at him.

Sonic sighs and pulls the folded paper out from the envelope, handing it to him. “I’ve never had money before. So, I just want your opinion,” Sonic explains nervously, “Do you think this is enough to pay for Silver’s college?”

Shadow face drops when he realizes what Sonic is saying now. A warm smile crosses his face as he takes the paper from Sonic and slowly unfolds it, “Sonic, that’s very...” Shadow’s trail of thought stops where it is when he looks down at the check in front of him.

“So...?” Sonic winces, “Whaddya think?”

Shadow’s eyes are reading and rereading the amount on the check. Counting the zeroes over and over again. He has to take a moment to look away before, burying his face into his hand and trying not to laugh at him.

Sonic’s face drops, “It’s not enough, is it?”

“Sonic... We could pay off our *house* and then some with this,” Shadow informs him.

Sonic gives him a look of horror, “What!? No, all of that is Silver’s! You gotta promise me!”

Shadow just sighs before nodding at him, “Alright. I will create an account for Silver the next chance I get.”

“Nice!” Sonic says, giving him a thumbs up.

“So, are you planning on doing this more often or...?” Shadow asks.

“Ew! No way!” Sonic gives him a disgusted look, “Do you know how many boring phone calls and



Skype meetings I had to sit through for this? Talking to a bunch of boring dudes with equally boring suits talking about profits and blah blah blah. I almost didn't finish this thing."

Shadow can only respect Sonic's decision. He just finds it a bit humorous. Anyone else would probably jump at a chance like this.

He folds the check into his wallet and shakes his head with a slight laugh. Little does Silver know that he's going to be a millionaire the moment he turns eighteen. Shadow makes a mental note to himself to never accuse Sonic of not helping financially *ever* again.

Silver barrels up to his parents and asks, "Blaze offered to take me out to the beach so I can ride my board! *Please!*"

Shadow doesn't look too sure.

"He said, 'Please,'" Sonic points out.

Shadow sighs and feels a little generous all things considered, "Alright."

"Yes!" Silver shouts eagerly before running back.

"But..."

Silver stops and groans. He knew there would be a catch.

"You're to leave before sundown," Shadow states.

"Sundown?" Sonic snickers a little, "The kid is a nightlight."

Shadow doesn't say anything in response. He's a nightlight, yes; but that also makes him a target.

Silver nods to him respectfully, "Alright. I promise."

"Very good," Shadow replies, waving his hand as if to signal Silver he can run away now.

"Wait," Sonic stops him and rests his hands to his cheeks, "Where'd you get those goggles from?"

Silver's face turns red and he runs away with his hands on said goggles to try and hide them, "None of your business!"

Sonic finds it adorable.

"Your brother perhaps," Shadow absently offers as he compiles all of the papers spread out over the table into a neat pile.

"Maybe," is all Sonic says. Although he has a hunch he knows the real answer.

-

Blaze is sitting a ways away, but still in eyesight of the two. Silver grips his head as he walks alongside the shoreline with Marine, "My dad almost did it again."

"Did what?" Marine asks.

"Asking me questions like that in front of my father," Silver responds before pulling the goggles down to his eyes.

Marine doesn't really understand.

"Jet," Silver murmurs quietly like he's afraid someone is listening, "The goggles are from Jet."

"No way!" Marine shouts.

Silver presses his hands against Marine's mouth to silence her, "You can't tell anyone though. My father flipped when he saw us together."

"Together?" Marine asks, pushing Silver's hands away from her face. She gasps when she realizes what he's saying, "So, you 'n Jet are friends!?"

Silver nearly collapses and hides his face, "Marine!!!"

Marine blinks before pressing her own hands to her mouth, "Oh, it's a secret, ain't it?"

Silver just glares up at her.

"No worries! I won't tell a soul," Marine announces proudly.

Silver just sighs and shakes his head because he doubts it.

There's a large crowd gathered at the end of the beach and it gets the two kid's attentions. Silver is pretty intrigued by this. He throws down his board and gets on, motioning for Marine to sit in front. The little raccoon girl does what she's told and Silver darts out toward the crowd.

It looks like a beach performance of some kind. Silver stops when he gets close to the crowd. He hears the crowd murmuring to one another.

"Is that the Legendary Wind Master?"

"No, apparently it's his son."

"Wow! He'll definitely take on the title one day."

Legendary...what? Silver doesn't really understand. Marine grabs Silver's hand and barges her way through the crowd, making room for Silver. He sheepishly thanks her and tries to get a closer look. His eyes veer up when he sees something soar through the sky. He pulls his goggles up and Silver's eyes widen when he sees who it is.

It's Jet and his siblings. They're creating currents and Jet is riding on them, doing intricate tricks in the air like he's weightless.

"Speak of the devil," Marine jokes. She looks around and realizes Silver is no longer next to her, "S-Silver?"

"Oh, no. No way. I'm not getting into more trouble than I'm already in," Silver grits out, already walking away.

"Silver, where're you goin'!?" Marine demands as she chases after him.

"I'm on thin ice," Silver states, not even looking back.

"Maybe," Marine says before walking in front of him, "but your father ain't here, right?"

Silver stops and looks away, "No..."

“Don’t cha wanna show him how good you’ve gotten!?” Marine asks, hyping him up.

Of course he does. He loves riding with Jet. It’s just that there’s a lot of people and it could risk everything. Shadow would pull him out of school and he’d really never see Jet again.

There’s a gust of wind that picks up and Silver feels compelled to turn around to see who it is. He pales when he notices Wave had landed right next to him. She sneers at him before shouting over to his brothers, “Hey, Jet! Look! It’s that *loser* from school!”

Jet’s midair for a moment, twisting his body around and stops when he sees the white hedgehog next to his sister. He swallows and lands short, wobbling a little and almost losing his balance. He makes his way through the crowd and glares at Silver as if silently asking why he’s there.

Wave continues anyway, “Looks like he has his fake gear too. You should show him how a pro does it.”

Silver eyes Jet’s board in pristine condition, “Your board is fixed.”

“Yeah, no thanks to *you*,” Jet retorts snottily.

Silver wonders how much of the real Jet means that.

“Sorry...” Silver mutters under his breath.

Jet frowns when he sees Silver’s demeanor change.

“Well, sorry’s not good enough,” Wave explains with her hands on her hips, “I put in unnecessary hours into fixing that thing and you’re going to pay for it.”

Silver just looks at her suspiciously. What did she mean by that? How much did Jet tell her about what had happened?

“Peh. Like I want his money,” Jet scoffs and turns away, retreating, “I’m already the richest living thing on earth. Probably the universe too.”

“You could make him look like the fool he is in front of everyone,” Wave suggests with a smirk.

Jet stops in his tracks. He looks over his shoulder at Silver as if to say to get out of there. When he doesn’t move, he turns around and says, “Fine, get over here.”

Silver looks dumbfounded at first, but Marine is pushing him forward shouting, “Anytime! Any place! You’ll be sorry! He’s ready for ya!”

Jet stares at Silver who is pushed in front of him. Jet just gives him an exasperated look before flicking his finger down to push Silver’s goggles back on. “You’d better be ready for me,” it’s almost a threat and a warning in one.

“Born ready,” Silver says with a determined look.

Jet smacks the back of his hand against his forehead, “You’re an idiot.” He walks back toward the crowd and disappears within it.

Silver places his hand on the spot Jet had tapped him at. That gesture has turned into something of a double meaning over time. Lately, it’s been used in a playful manner, but in this context it could be masked as demeaning. Maybe Jet had planned that this whole time.

Marine jumps up and down, “C’mon! What’re we waitin’ for!”

“R-right,” Silver nods to her and follows Jet through the crowd. Silver can hear the murmurs of the people around him. All he hears is his dad’s name being tossed around. Would it kill them to at least know who *he* was? He was more than just Sonic the Hedgehog’s son. He had a name. Silver sends them glares as he passes and they immediately stop their talking.

When he gets out of the clearing, there’s a small track in the sand. Most likely made by a few circuits around with their boards. The crowd most likely came later.

Silver’s more distracted by what’s in front of him that when Jet begins to speak he’s taken off guard, “Just you and me. First one who hits the ground loses.”

Silver raises an eyebrow at him. He sees Wave and Storm look at one another, but shrug as they stay at the side of the track.

“Unless you want to chicken out now,” Jet offers with a smirk.

Silver pretends like he’s thinking it over, “I don’t know? I’m not sure if I’d be able to shake your mantle of the lord of the chickens.”

“Only dish out what you can serve, Silver the Hedgehog,” Jet warns him like he has before as he pushes past him

Jet seems a lot angrier than usual. It could be the crowd or his presence. Maybe both.

Silver turns to the crowd right after Jet says his name and suddenly they’re murmuring his name. Why was it that Jet would always enunciate his name like that in public?

“Come on,” Jet grits out, already on the track, “Don’t keep me waiting.”

“Right,” Silver nods as he makes his way over. He tosses his board down, but misjudges how far and he sees Jet’s foot stomp onto it to prevent it from flying forward. Silver cringes and gains control over it soon after.

Jet lowers his goggles over his eyes and whispers over to Silver, “Just follow my lead. We’ll make it close.”

Silver gives him a surprised look, “What happened to fair races?”

“This isn’t a race,” Jet reminds him, “Just stay focused.”

Just as he hears that, he can see Marine shouting his name and waving. Silver just nods back to her with a little smile and gets into position.

Wave does the countdown and then they’re off.

Jet leads as he bends his knees low. He swoops around in a U-turn and Silver gasps at the sudden action as their boards briefly clash against one another. His board catches on the current, causing him to swoop around in a similar manner and he stabilizes himself before chasing after him again.

Jet glances over his shoulder and smirks at Silver when he sees that he’s still following behind. He switches position so his back foot is in front and it causes a hiccup in the current. He snickers as he watches Silver fumble a little from it and he does it again.

Silver braces his feet and bends his knees before jumping over the twisted current and lands back on

track. He looks up at Jet who is giving him a look a approval.

No way. Jet was teaching him.

Jet shifts his board and drifts around the corner. In turn, making the current behind him flow up higher.

Silver rides it to the top and is neck and neck with Jet now.

“Don’t get too cocky,” Jet warns him.

“Give me what you’ve got,” Silver shoots back with a confident smile, “I can take it.”

“Oh, really?” Jet says with a doubtful look. He skids his board and bumps into Silver’s before sling-shotting ahead.

Silver just watches in awe for a moment, “Whoa. He’s fast.” He gasps because he’s falling behind now. He gives Jet’s back a determined look before shooting off after him. He goes head-on with as much speed as he can, but he sees Jet dart around again. He falter back and for some reason he can hear his father’s words in the back of his mind.

*“Do not charge headfirst at your enemy unless you’re certain you have the upper hand.”*

Silver lowers his brow and skids to stop himself before zipping back the way he’d just come. He holds back, keeping his eye on Jet who is coming in close. When he sees him come up from behind, Silver bends his knees and jumps.

His board whizzing right under Jet and Silver flips backwards, just over Jet’s body. He swiftly lands on his board under his feet.

Jet is stunned for a moment before he feels the turbulence from behind him. Silver board was ramming into the backend of his. He tsks and switches footing before drifting around Silver and settling with riding next to him. “I guess you have a few tricks of your own,” Jet says, trying not to sound impressed.

Silver holds his hand up to his ears and asks, “I’m sorry. Was that a compliment?”

Jet turns his head away with his nose in the air.

“That’s cute,” Silver says darkly before ramming his board against Jet’s once more.

Jet is taken by surprise and swivels back, but regains his balance. He grits his teeth and shoots out after him again. He would *not* be bested by a beginner. He goes to rush forward, but Silver swerves out of the way before their boards can collide. He tries once more, but Silver dodges it again. Jet tightens his hands into fists and lets out an irritated noise.

Silver shoots Jet a look over his shoulder before saying, “Don’t be such a *killjoy*, Jet.”

Jet is seeing red now. How dare he throw his own words back at him. Jet rushes up, allows Silver to dodges, but he grabs Silver by the wrist instead.

“Whoa!” Silver loses his balance for a moment, but catches himself. He meets Jet’s eyes and asks, “What is your problem? Aren’t we having fun?”

Their boards coil around and Jet’s is on top of Silver’s. The spinning is causing currents to whips up around them before they form a small cyclone that boosts them into the air. Their boards go flying,

landing below them and they begin to free fall.

Silver panics and holds his hands out, “Grab my hand!”

Jet does so with no hesitation. He shouts over the wind whipping around them, “I’m sorry! I’m a hypocrite!”

“So am I,” Silver shouts back, “Half the time I feel like there’s two people piloting my body!”

“Silver?” Jet says, staring into his eyes.

“Yes?” Silver questions with some surprise.

“That’s weird. Don’t ever say that again,” Jet finishes with a disgusted look.

“Uh… okay,” Silver responds before looking down, “Are we slowing down?”

“That’s not how gravity works, Silver,” Jet tries to say matter-of-factly, but when he looks down they are definitely descending at a slower rate.

“Silver!”

Silver gasps when he feels one strong arm around him. When he looks up he notices Blaze taking each kid under her arm and then free falling to the sand as flames lick at her feet. She lands in a burst of flames and the super heated sand creates an intricate glass structure around them.

She drops Jet onto the ground, but places Silver down with care. “Don’t run off like that. I was worried sick,” she scolds him.

“Sorry…” Silver mutters a bit embarrassed. He looks around and apparently Blaze’s show had scared away the crowd that had formed.

Blaze stands in front of Silver and glares down at Jet, “Is this boy bothering you?”

Jet shrinks back on himself when he sees the fire in her eyes.

“N-no, we’re friends,” Silver tries to iron out, but winces, “Well, we’re… um… It’s complicated.”

“I can make it even more complicated,” Blaze states as she cracks her knuckles.

“Not necessary!” Silver shouts, pulling at the sleeve of her shirt.

Marine comes barreling over with Silver’s board in her hands, “Blimey! That was quite the show, Silver! You had ‘im on the ropes!”

“It wasn’t that close…” Jet grumbles out.

Silver makes his way over to Jet and holds his hand out, “Good game. That was fun.”

Jet looks up at Silver’s hand for a moment before smacking it out of his face and picking himself up. “Yeah, I guess,” Jet mutters before making his way off to find his board.

Blaze places her hands on her hips, “Honestly Silver, I don’t know why you even bother with him. Is he really worth all of this madness?”

Silver sighs and watches him go. He walks back over to Blaze and looks up at her, “I don’t know

why I do either. It's just...a reaction. Something I can't control, but...I can tell. I can feel it. There's good in him." He holds his hands out to Marine and takes his board before walking down the other way.

Blaze raises an eyebrow at Silver before letting her eyes rest on the green hawk. She frowns and shakes her head like she doesn't understand, but follows after Silver anyway.

The rest of the day consists of Blaze creating ramps for Silver to ride on out of super heating the sand. Although the lifeguards get mad after awhile and Blaze has to then shatter them and scatter the pieces into the ocean. It's tedious, but it kept Silver happy for a bit so she doesn't find it too irritating.

After she's done though, she loses sight of Silver yet again. She's about to go on a tantrum when she finds him sitting and talking with Jet under the pier. Those two were becoming inseparable and she wonders if she should be worried or not.

Regardless, she keeps her mouth shut and makes sure to take Silver home before sundown.

## Dawning



### Chapter Twenty-Four: Dawning

It's close to midnight as the moon shines into the bedroom. Sonic is fast asleep, curled in on himself with a slight smile on his face without a care in the world.

The figure in the corner of the room just glares at him. Anger shown on his face as he takes slow, silent step forward. His canines gleam in the moonlight as his blood red sword comes into view. He has it in both hands just above the blue hero's sleeping form. He lifts it up and goes to thrust down, but his arm is caught almost immediately.

His sword is pulled from his hands and his arms twisted behind his back before the blade is pressed against his throat.

Shadow's glaring red eyes come into view at the side of his face as the dark hedgehog whispers, "If you value your life you won't make a sound." Getting the response Shadow wants, he pulls him toward the doorway. Shadow glances down the hall to make sure Silver's door is closed tight before pulling the guy who foolishly thought he could break into his home down the steps.

As he gets to the front door, he kicks him down and the moonlight unveils that he's a jackal. Shadow's eyes narrow on him and he softly clicks the front door shut. He makes his way over to the downed jackal and holds the blade out to him before stating, "Who are you and who sent you?"

The jackal carefully lifts his head and Shadow can see the familiar scar and blue on his right eye.

"Zero?" Shadow asks, confused by this. He hardens his features and takes a step forward, "You



have two minutes before I determine whether or not I want to slit your throat right here and now.”

“Your speed and stealth are unmatched. I am impressed by how quickly you detained me,” Zero scoffs, but feels the blade closer to his throat. He swallows and his adam’s apple just grazes the sharp sword.

“Tell me what the hell you think you’re doing,” Shadow grits out with cold fury, “You broke into my home and attempted to *murder* my husband.”

Zero holds his hands up in surrender and says hoarsely, “Look, I can explain.”

Shadow pulls the sword back just a fraction, “Who sent you? Who’s threatening you? What do they have on you? Because I will take care of it *personally*.”

Zero relaxes a bit and laughs, “Oh, it is nothing like that, Shadow.”

“Talk,” Shadow orders, eyes narrowing on him.

“I am liberating you,” Zero responds with a proud gleam to his eye, “This home is but a prison and Sonic... Well, he is your shackles.”

Shadow gives him a dumbfounded look like he couldn’t believe those words came out of Zero’s mouth. “Give me one reason why I shouldn’t *kill* you right now,” Shadow remarks, feeling the twitch at his wrist.

“Simple,” Zero tells him, “I have figured it out. Everything. I have uncovered the truth. I thought it was weird that you so easily refused my offer. It is not like you at all, but... Then again, you are not yourself, are you?”

“Zero,” Shadow grits out through clenched teeth, “I am one swift move from cutting your fucking head off. Get to your point.”

“Sonic is Chaos,” Zero states with a smug look.

Shadow’s eyes widen when he hears those words from his mouth.

Zero’s smirk widens, “I knew it.”

“What makes you think that?” Shadow asks, feeling his heart thundering in his chest.

“I looked into the doctor’s final attack. On his computer, he used something called the soul of Chaos to control you. It was the same thing Black Doom used to control you, is it not?” Zero explains calmly, “Well, if GUN did not collect it after they looked over the base, where did it go? You and Sonic had gotten *closer* after that encounter and, if my assumptions are correct, that is because Sonic is using it to control you. But where is it? I believe it is *inside* him. Fused within his body and he is using it to manipulate you. Sure, I was skeptical at first. How could a god, such as yourself, be controlled by some blue hedgehog, but... Then, I saw it. Blue quills. Green eyes. He is Chaos... The god of destruction.”

Shadow rubs the bridge of his nose with agitation, “You are delving into things you don’t understand, Zero.”

“What have I gotten wrong?” Zero says with a small laugh, “You want revenge on these humans for killing your sister, correct?”

“I don’t want that anymore,” Shadow states, his posture deflating a little.

“Why? These humans are a disgusting race. They bring nothing, but destruction. They worship a god that encourages it,” Zero asks like he’s demanding an answer.

“Maria Robotnik,” Shadow murmurs.

“What?” Zero asks in confusion.

“That was my sister’s name,” Shadow affirms.

Zero’s eyes fall to the ground when he realizes what Shadow is telling him. The pieces all falling into place. “Your… ‘sister’ was a human?” Zero grits out in disgust like he can’t believe it.

Shadow nods, “Yes, I am surprised you hadn’t figured that out given what you managed uncovered.”

“Yeah…” Zero mutters before pulling himself back to his feet, “Because I did not think, for one moment, that you would affiliate yourself with those *disgusting* humans. A Robotnik no less.”

“Those experiments. My origins. They’ve all come from Robotniks, Zero. Then again, I doubt you’d have the password or information that is on the ARK,” Shadow explains. He shakes his head and lowers the sword, “Don’t dwell on this any longer. It’s none of your concern and in the past. Move on.”

Zero gives Shadow an amused look and finds himself chuckling at that, “Move on? After all of this? You are not at all who you said you were. You are smoke and mirrors. You are the living embodiment of a lie. And I fell for it. I *trusted* you.”

“What will you do? Will you fight me?” Shadow throws down Zero’s sword to his feet with a clang, “Because I don’t want to fight you.”

Zero glares down at his sword before leaning down to grab it. The moment he does though, Shadow’s knee is in his gut and he’s doubled over on the ground.

Shadow sighs and gives Zero a disappointed look before he pulls out his phone. He waits for it to ring before the other line comes to life. Shadow speaks into the receiver like he’s upset things went the way they had, “Detective, I… I need dispatch to pick up Zero. I finally have a motive…”

Zero’s eyes widen when he hears that, “You were *waiting* for this! You tricked me! You thought you would get closer to me and rat me out! You are a pathetic waste of a god! Your powers do not belong to someone like you!”

Shadow ends the call and gives Zero a frown, “Do yourself a favor, Zero. When they come pick you up, remain silent.”

Zero growls before reaching for his sword once more. He howls out in pain when Shadow’s foot collides with it to stop him. He winces and feels his limbs shaking. He’s terrified. He’s truly alone in this world now. He gave up everything for Shadow. His life. His family. His squad. He’d betrayed them just so Shadow would betray him in return. He had no one.

Then again, is he surprised? This has been his life up until this point.

“Sometimes… you have to play with what you are dealt,” Zero whispers against the pavement,

“That is just the way it goes. Blend into your environment and gather the information you can. I will

rise again and you will be my first target, Shadow.”

Shadow can't look at him. He felt he'd done everything he could to try and protect him. Maybe he hadn't done enough. Maybe he'd done too much. He was so sure he could fix him. He's more disappointed with himself than anything.

The flashing lights come into view a moment later. Vector is pushing Zero to the ground and cuffing him. Espio makes his way over to Shadow and Shadow can't look him in the eye.

“You did the right thing,” Espio tells him after he had gotten what he needed from Shadow.

Shadow can only wonder if he did though. He can see Vector shoving Zero into one of the many cop cars in front of his home and he can't get the angry, feral look from the jackal out of his mind.

“Shadow?”

Shadow turns to the porch and sees Sonic standing there confused.

Espio bows respectfully before turning to leave them alone. He makes his way into one of the cars and they drive away with Zero.

Shadow takes a step onto the porch and sees Silver at the doorway with a confused look on his face. Shadow exchanges a look with Sonic before placing a hand on his shoulder, “I need to talk to Silver for a moment.”

A warm smile appears on Sonic's face when he hears that, “Go for it.”

Shadow nods and walks up to Silver, extending his hand to him.

“Father?” Silver asks.

“I need to tell you what I do at work,” is all Shadow says before guiding Silver back into the house.

Sonic follows them in, but keeps his distance so he can give the two some space.

Shadow sits on the couch with his legs cross, elbow resting on the arm rest as he looks out the window. He waits for Silver to crawl onto the couch next to him. He can feel Silver's eyes staring up at him and Shadow begins, “Silver, all of us have a drive. A purpose. Something they want. I want to protect as many people as I can.”

Silver nods like he understands.

“To do that, I chose to work for the United Federation's military force. It's called Guardians Units of Nations. The specifics of what I do is classified, but—to put it in simplest terms—we plan out organized assaults in order to stop those who try to threaten the public,” Shadow explains, but glances over at Silver to see if he's following.

Silver nods once more, “Like a super hero.”

“No,” Shadow shakes his head, “it isn't like that at all.”

“Yes, it is,” Silver tries to push.

“No, this is reality. It isn't some pictures in a book. It's real-life decisions made by real-life people and the decisions you make in response...”

“...come with consequences,” Silver finishes with a determined look, “I understand that. Plans don’t always go right and sometimes you can’t predict how people are going to act. And that’s fine because you’re trying to call the best shots you can. It’s impossible to just see into the future. You have to choose which route is the best for each situation, but situations change. Therefore, your actions need to change as well. Things aren’t just static. They aren’t just black and white. Just like how in Captain America where Steve wanted to save his friend Bucky, but he had to go against all of his friends to do it...”

Shadow grits his teeth and orders, “Stop it, Silver! Get your head out of those stupid books and think realistically.”

Silver gives him an offended look, “Is it me who isn’t thinking realistically? Or is it you who is just a pessimist?”

Shadow just stands up with his back toward him, “I knew you weren’t old enough to talk about this.”

Silver’s eyes widen when he hears that and he can feel the tears pricking at the corners of his eyes. He collapses onto the couch and begins to cry into the cushions.

Shadow glances over at the kid who is shaking and sobbing. He sighs and makes his way up the stairs into the bedroom.

Sonic is standing there like he was waiting for him with a hopeful look, “So, how’d it go?”

“Go take care of him,” Shadow states before walking to the other side of the bed and sitting down.

Sonic’s shoulders drop a little like he wasn’t expecting that, “Wait. What?” He begins to walk around toward him, but stops when Shadow places a hand on his.

“I’ll tell you everything tomorrow,” Shadow murmurs.

Sonic has a feeling he isn’t talking about Silver anymore. Sonic just nods to him, “Yeah, okay.”

Shadow hears Sonic walk out and down the stairs, hushing and comforting Silver. All of this had gotten so real so fast. He’s been prepared for something like this, but he’d never expect it from someone he was trying to protect. He knew Zero’s morals were messed up and that he had a tendency to act out, but he would have never predicted this.

It’s strange. Shadow feels hurt, but not because he’d been betrayed. His heart clenches because Zero was so lost in his mind and so consumed with finding the truth that he’s built an entire life on those unachievable expectations. Possibly getting disappointed over and over again.

Shadow doesn’t even know if what he’d done was right. It was his fault Zero was so messed up, but he couldn’t have him trying to kill Sonic every moment he gets. Shadow had known Zero harbored some hatred for him, but he didn’t think he’d actually attempt to kill him. The terrifying thing is that he might have done it if Shadow weren’t there to stop him.

Shadow feels so conflicted, but maybe that’s the problem. He feels for him. Something he never should have allowed himself to do. Espio had been right. He’d gotten too emotionally attached. He’d seen Zero as a younger version of himself reaching out for help and Shadow felt like he couldn’t let go.

But Zero wasn’t him. He hadn’t changed and that was the harsh reality for him.

Not everyone does.

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The next morning, Sonic gasps loudly when he hears a knock on the door. He looks between Shadow and Silver who both don't seem to be sharing his enthusiasm. "Who could that be!?" Sonic asks, eying Silver as if he should know.

Silver is just glaring at him. If it's Jet, he might just disown this whole family.

Sonic gets up and rushes to the door. He opens the door and says loudly, "Tails!? What are you doing here?"

Tails' voice can be heard from the other room, "You're joking, right? I called yesterday and told you I was bringing the shoes ov--!" The rest of Tails' sentence is muffled like Sonic is covering his mouth.

"Sh! It's a surprise," Sonic whispers.

Silver rolls his eyes. He gets up because he'd rather not be at the kitchen table alone with his father anyway. The moment he goes to meet them at the door, Sonic is running at him.

Sonic has his arms behind his back as if he's hiding something, "Close your eyes."

"I'm not doing this," Silver states, getting fed up.

"I'm not giving them to you until you do," Sonic informs him.

Silver sighs in surrender because he knows Sonic's words are the truth. So, he closes his eyes.

Sonic snickers before holding the boots up to him, "Okay. Now, open."

Silver opens his eyes and is met with them. He's awing at how shiny the toes are. They were actually really nice. "Can I try them on?" Silver asks.

"Thank Tails first," Sonic says, jabbing his thumb behind him at his brother.

Silver nods his head toward him, "Thank you, uncle."

Tails just smiles bashfully, "It was nothing."

Silver sits on the floor as he unfastens his inhibitors one at a time like he'd been shown how to do since he was little and refastens them over the lip of the boots. He looks them over and expected them to feel a little stiff, but they're actually quite flexible. He gets up and stands in a riding pose. The fabric of the shoe forms around his ankle comfortably. Even more so than his normal shoes. "Wow! These are amazing," Silver responds with a smile, "I love them!"

"We knew you would," Sonic explains proudly, "It's a Sonic, Tails, and Shadow collaboration."

Silver glares over at Shadow before turning away.

Tails leans into Sonic and whispers, "Something happen?"

Sonic sighs, "They're just butting heads. It'll pass." He brightens up his mood though and holds his hand out to Silver, "Ready for school, bud?"

"I guess," Silver replies with a shrug.

"I can drop him off," Tails offers.

Sonic blinks at him, "Really?"

"Totally," Tails affirms in a chipper tone. He leans in and whispers, "It'll give you a chance to talk to Shadow about the whole ordeal that happened last night."

"How do you know about that?" Sonic asks impatiently.

Tails pulls out his phone and shows him one of the news articles, "Um... It's not a secret."

Sonic goes to grab it, but Tails is already pocketing his phone. He snickers at his brother's attempt though. "C'mon, Silver! I'll give you a lift to school," Tails says as he guides Silver out the door.

"Make sure he puts the boots in his bag before you drop him off," Sonic calls out to him from the front door.

Tails just waves him off and gives him a peace sign.

Sonic taps his foot on the ground. He hopes his brother took his warning seriously. Shadow would be on his ass if not. He closes the door and heads back over to the kitchen.

Before Sonic can even open his mouth, Shadow confirms, "I heard. Your brother is taking Silver to school."

Sonic sighs and takes a seat next to him, "You're in a sour mood."

"You want me to explain what happened," Shadow states.

"I mean, you don't have to. We can... ya know, sit outside and watch the clouds go by," Sonic reasons with a shrug. Anything to get something other than robotic responses from Shadow.

"He tried to kill you," Shadow murmurs under his breath.

Sonic rests his palm to his cheek and says, "You're gunna have to give me a little more context, Shads."

Shadow holds his head and replies like he still can't believe it, "Zero."

"The rookie?" Sonic asks with eyebrow raised with amusement, "What'd I do this time? Did I cut him off on the freeway?" It was meant to brighten up Shadow's spirits, but Shadow doesn't look like he's bouncing back from this. Sonic scoots his chair closer and asks a little softer, "Wanna talk about it?"

"I should have saw it coming. There were so many signs, but..." Shadow turns away like he's ashamed of himself, "I was too naïve. I thought he could change. I held onto the small thread of hope."

"There's nothin' wrong with that," Sonic tries to say.

"No, it almost got you killed," Shadow states in a grim tone.

Sonic rubs the back of his neck and responds, "There's something I've been meaning to ask about this Zero guy. You're so hard on Silver, yet you seemed to be a lot more lenient with him. Is there

like... a reason for that?"

"Silver is better than this," Shadow mutters in anger, "He was brought up in a loving home. He was given a stable childhood. I expect *more* from him. Zero came from nothing."

Sonic taps his finger against his cheek a few times before saying, "Correct me if I'm wrong, but it kinda seems like you're afraid to get close to Silver so you're using this Zero guy as a placeholder so you can experience fatherhood in an environment where you won't be held accountable for his actions."

Shadow doesn't move.

"Shadow?" Sonic asks carefully.

"I don't know what I'm doing anymore," Shadow confesses as he slumps forward with his fist to his head, "I thought I had everything under control, but everything just fell apart in front of me." He swallows and slowly reaches over to Sonic's hand before whispering, "I'm terrified."

Sonic squeezes Shadow's hand and announces, "We're Team Sonic, right? And what's the number one rule of Team Sonic?"

"Not now..." Shadow says dismissively.

"What's the number one rule, Shadow?!" Sonic emphasizes.

Shadow sighs and replies stubbornly, "We work as a team."

"That's right and that's what's gunna happen from now on," Sonic says as he waves his hand for Shadow to continue, "Now, tell me everything and don't leave anything out."

Shadow sighs and does just that. Starting from the beginning. About the jackal squad and the investigation and Zero signing up for GUN. He tells Sonic how he's a target and they were trying to break out Eggman from Prison Island. Then, he shamefully tells him about how Zero lost control and killed the leader of squad and how he stayed silent to cover for him so he wouldn't get arrested. He also adds how they've been meeting each night, tearing apart buildings and the like, all while ignoring how unstable he was becoming.

Sonic takes in all of the information with a pleasant smile and when Shadow is done, Sonic politely asks, "Could you hand me that newspaper really quick?"

"Uh..." Shadow slides the newspaper that's resting next to him.

"Thanks," Sonic nods and takes it. He rolls it up and begins hitting Shadow with it like an irritating fly, "What the heck were you thinking, Shadow!?"

Shadow covers his head and fends off the annoying swats, "Stop it!"

"No way!" Sonic says with anger as he keeps swatting his head, "Dude! The guy is from a cultist organization! That was your first clue! You're lucky Espio didn't mail your corpse to me in a body bag the moment you fucked with his investigation! Forgive people *after* they've made an attempt to redeem themselves, not before!"

"I was just... *ow!*" Shadow winces because that specific swat hit him in the eye. He reaches to grab the newspaper and pulls it out of Sonic's grip and tosses it to the side, "I saw myself in him, alright?"

Sonic's face saddens when he hears that, "Why didn't you tell me any of this?"

"It was... confidential... and..." Shadow begins to stammer.

Sonic just raises an eyebrow at him.

Shadow looks away and lets out an agitated noise, "You were....hurt. I didn't want to bring up anything GUN related to you, remember?"

"Shadow, your job doesn't worry me," Sonic admits with embarrassment, "It messes me up when we're not together."

Shadow just stares at Sonic for a long moment before burying his face into his hand. He slowly goes to hand Sonic the newspaper again.

Sonic lets out a small laugh and gives him one more light tap with it. "To be fair... I'm not good at telling anyone I'm hurting," Sonic says before smacking himself on the head and laughing.

"It would appear we both need to be a little more open," Shadow states.

"You a lot more than me," Sonic retorts in a snarky tone.

"I'd say it's no contest, but it really isn't," Shadow remarks with a frown, "You're right. I apologize."

"Be a little easier on Silver too," Sonic requests with a smile.

Shadow gives him one sharp nod, "I will." He sighs and folds his arms across his chest, "I suppose I will have to start by making amends with that...*boy*."

"Jet," Sonic corrects him, "His name is Jet."

Shadow snarls a little, "I will address him *after* he's earned my respects."

Sonic just gives him a sheepish laugh. That poor kid has no idea what trap he's fallen into by becoming friends with Silver. Although this seemed to be a good start. At least Shadow seemed to be a little more open about this.



# Self-fulfilling Prophecy

## Chapter Notes

I want to put a mild warning on this chapter b/c of how some ppl reacted to previous chapters. Just a reminder that you should be aware of your own triggers. That is your responsibility.

Also the next couple chapters will probably be kind of heavy. There will have their light moments, but it'll begin to get emotional from here.

If that doesn't sound like something you want to continue reading, I understand. Take care of yourself first. Just know that this is personally the direction I want to go with this.

Thank you.



## Chapter Twenty-Five: Self-fulfilling Prophecy

Silver promises he'll take off his boots.

...Right after he walks past Jet's desk.

He can see the green hawk gawking at them too. Silver just smirks to himself before removing them

at the coat rack and slipping his regular shoes on. He makes his way to his desk and waits patiently for class to start when he feels something hit his head. He ruffles his quills and a piece of paper falls onto his desk.

Silver glances back at Jet and Jet is pretending Silver doesn't exist.

Silver shoots him a glare before unfolding the piece of paper.

*Nice boots. Very cool.*

Silver rereads it. Jet had outright complimented him. No snarky remark or anything accompanying it. Silver kind of wants to put them back on now because they make he feel kind of special.

He doesn't get the chance because Mrs. Labyrinth is addressing the class to get to their seats before the bell rings.

Silver feels giddy in his seat. He can't wait until recess.

Recess does finally arrive and Silver is waving off Mr. Marble before rushing out to grab his things. He's surprised, but not really too surprised Jet is waiting outside the classroom for him.

"A little birdie told me you liked my shoes," Silver informs him as he grabs his bag from the coat rack.

Jet waits at the doorway, leaning against it as he says nonchalantly, "It has Sonic's trademark design choices on it. So yeah, they're cool."

"Oh," Silver pouts his lip before pulling his boots on one at a time, "So, you were just fanboying over my dad again."

Jet taps his heel against the door frame and ponders quietly for a moment before stating, "Well... the design choices are Sonic's, but... Ya know, they aren't red so..."

Silver glances up at Jet as his gaze falls to Jet's boots. It finally clicks in his head, "Wait. Did my dad design your boots?"

Jet's face turns beat red and he stands up straight, "I-I mean...! Well... not for *me* exactly, but I bought them online. Way after his short lived business closed down. So, these weren't cheap. They're limited edition and super rare. I have the soles refurbished every other month to keep them looking new."

Silver claps his hands over his mouth and stifles his laughter until he can't contain it, "That has got to be the nerdiest thing that's ever come out of your mouth!"

Jet curls his hands into fists, "Shut up!"

"I'm just teasing," Silver smiles before hopping back onto his feet, tapping the toes on the ground and grabbing his board. Silver walks past him before tapping the back of his hand to his forehead, "Ready to race, Jet the Hawk?"

Jet looks baffled by Silver's touch as he watches him go. Silver has gotten a lot more confident lately and Jet is finding it really jarring. He's not sure what to make of it.

"Come on, slowpoke!" Silver calls out to him from down the hallway.

Jet grits his teeth and runs after him.

Silver is already on his board and fixing his goggles over his eyes by the time Jet gets there. Wave just elbows him and says, “Not a good way to start out this race. Looks like your combatant is more ready than you are.”

“Race doesn’t start until you say go,” Jet reminds her, “Also, this is between me and him. No one else.”

“With all the blabbering you’ve done, how could I forget,” Wave responds sassily.

Jet tosses his board down and hops on it. There’s already a crowd of kids huddled around their ‘finish line.’ He makes his way next to Silver and whispers to him, “You ready?”

“Definitely,” Silver responds with a quick nod.

Jet just nods and gets into a ready stance himself.

Wave stands in front of them and holds her hand up in the air, “3... 2...”

Silver narrows his eyes and braces himself.

“1... *Go!*”

They dart off at the same time, but Jet’s acceleration is unmatched and Silver begins to fall behind. He tries not to get discouraged though. He picks up some speed by riding Jet’s currents. Jet really wasn’t holding back this time and it was starting to show.

“I can do this, right? This is what I’ve been training for,” Silver murmurs to himself. He thinks about how many hours and how many days he’d practiced with Jet. Learning the proper stance and balance.

He thinks about how Shadow caught them together and how he smashed Jet’s board and he wavers a bit.

Jet glances over his shoulder at Silver with concern.

He thinks about how many times Shadow’s discouraged him and how he feels like he’s not good enough. No matter what he does, it’ll never be enough in his eyes. He will never get his father’s approval.

Jet bends his knees and switches his stance back and forth to pick up the waves behind him.

Silver feels the turbulence under him and instead of it knocking him out of his thoughts, it takes him off guard entirely. He wobbles before falling off his board onto the grass under him.

Jet visibly slows his pace after that, but doesn’t stop. He can’t stop.

Silver beats his fist into the ground and seethes through his teeth. He couldn’t even get *this* right. He looks up and feels the tears welling up in his eyes. He’ll never be able to catch up with Jet now. He should just give up, but... he can’t. He won’t.

Silver grabs his board and gets a running start before tossing it down again. He bends his knees low and just catches the tail end of Jet’s dissipating currents. He zeros in on the finish line and gives it his all. He feels the energy rushing to his feet and the engine picks up into overdrive. He’s boosting forward faster, faster, faster...

So fast that he’s starting to realize his feet aren’t on the board anymore. “Oh...oh no,” Silver gasps

out, flailing his legs a little. He can't stop. His body is being slingshot forward and just as he crosses the finish line and passes up Jet there's a loud sonic boom.

Silver tumbles onto the ground like a ragdoll and lays motionless as he tries to catch his breath and figure out what had just happened.

Jet rushes into his vision a moment later, his eyes big in awe, "Silver, did you... were you flying without a board?"

"I..." Silver tries to reply, but his body is shaking. He lets Jet help him onto his feet again and he looks around.

The kids were knocked over having been effected by the blast. Some were helping up others, but the majority of them are looking at Silver with terror.

Silver takes a step back and places a hand to his mouth, "Did I cause that?"

Some of the kid's faces turn into anger as they get back onto their feet.

One of the teachers comes forward and she's signaling for Silver to follow her.

"Yeah, get out of here, weird-o!"

"You're dangerous!"

"We knew something was wrong with you!"

Silver looks down at his feet and takes a step forward.

Jet takes his hand, "I'm coming with. I'll explain what happened."

Silver doesn't have it in him to object. He's just doing his best not to bawl his eyes out in front of everyone.

They walk over to the teacher together and one of the kids shouts, "Don't go with that loser, Jet! He'll hurt you too!"

Jet stops and turns to the crowd of students. He looks tired and done as he says, "Silver is my friend. He'd never hurt me."

The kids look disgusted and begin to murmur to one another.

Silver just looks stunned, "Jet... Don't..."

Jet just squeezes his hand and guides him into the building where they follow the teacher into the principal's office.

-

Sonic is sitting up-side-down as he fills out a list of words for his madlibs and Shadow is replying to an email from Topaz explaining exactly how much time off he needs for medical leave when he doesn't really need it.

Sonic is snickering as he slides the book in front of the computer screen, "You gotta read this one. It's hilarious!"

Shadow sighs and drops his hands from the keyboard before taking the book into his hands, “If I must.”

Sonic sits on his knees like a giddy kid because he loves when Shadow reads his ridiculous creations in his monotone voice.

“Alright. So, the title is *The Adventures of Mr.*” Shadow trails off as he squints his eyes to read the text Sonic had filled in, “...*Poopy.*”

Sonic is already laughing his ass off at this point.

Shadow shakes his head and continues anyway, “Mr. *Poopy* is an adventurous *snail* that finds great pleasure in *crop dusting* his neighbors.” Shadow smacks his lips and watches Sonic completely lose it next to him, “Oh, yes. Grade A potty humor, Sonic... You’re a lyrical genius.”

Sonic waves him to continue, “Keep going! Keep going! It gets better!”

Shadow sighs and sits back against the couch with a bored look, “On Saturday nights, Mr. *Poopy* likes to sweep up *donut holes* in the *McDonald’s parking lot.*”

Sonic is sputtering his lips and smacking his hand onto the couch cushions in an obnoxious manner.

Shadow grimaces as Sonic is shaking the whole couch and it’s making it harder to read. He just wants to finish this so he can go on to doing more important things. “That is where he met his girlfriend, *Shrimp Scampi*, and they have been together in their *smelly* relationship ever since. Their first date was at a drive-in where *Batman* tried to hit on her, but Mr. *Poopy*...” Shadow stops and places the book down, “I can’t do this. It’s too juvenile.”

“Just do it! Just do it! Finish what you’ve started, Shadow,” Sonic encourages him, punching his fists in the air.

Shadow can feel his eyebrow twitching and he’s trying to figure out why he’d ever married this man, “...Threw *twelve onion rings* and swooped in at the nick of *bread.*” Shadow flips the book closed and places it back onto Sonic’s lap, “Get better hobby.”

“It was supposed to be funny,” Sonic says with a pout. Before Shadow can open his mouth, Sonic’s phone goes off and he grabs it off the coffee table. He sees that it’s Silver’s school and he answers with a friendly, “Hello, Mr. the Hedgehog speaking!” Sonic nods a few times, but his face drops a little, “Are... are you sure?”

Shadow raises an eyebrow at him.

Sonic nods some more and responds with a wavering, “Y-yeah, I’ll be right there. Okay. Okay. Yeah, bye.” Sonic ends the call and gives his phone a concerned look.

“What is it?” Shadow asks as he places his laptop on the table.

Sonic takes in a deep breath before turning to Shadow, “Promise not to freak out?”

Every nerve in Shadow’s body is spiked from those words alone. “What did he do?” Shadow states, coldly.

“I don’t know the whole story, but I’m gunna go find out now,” Sonic tries to say, calmly.

“*We*,” Shadow corrects him as he’s already getting up and making his way to the front door, “*We* are

going there and *we* are going to find out.”

“I’m sure it’s not that urgent,” Sonic tries to say as he follows him.

Shadow narrows his eyes at him and takes a step forward, “I can tell you’re lying to me! I can see it in your eyes! If it were *nothing* you would not be acting like this!”

Sonic places his hands on Shadow’s shoulders, “Just calm down, okay?”

“I am calm,” Shadow responds through clenched teeth before swatting Sonic’s arms away from him.

Sonic just sighs and slips on his shoes before following Shadow out the door.

-

Silver is shaking in his skin. They’d called his dad. He was coming. And, most likely, so was his father. Silver runs his fingers through his quills and pulls at them. He wants to disappear. He wishes a hole would just appear under him and just consume him whole.

“Breathe,” Jet whispers to him.

“You shouldn’t be here,” Silver protests, almost unable to speak.

“It’ll be okay,” Jet tries to say.

“No,” Silver responds shakily, “My father is going to kill me.”

Jet rubs Silver’s back before he hears the door open.

Sonic walks in first, waving and greeting principal as if there is no trouble at all. It’s a moment, but Shadow walks in after. His eyes lay on Jet and his silent stare is enough to command Jet to take his hand off of his son.

Jet swallows and slowly withdraws his hand.

“Hey, kiddo,” Sonic greets Silver, but frowns when Silver just hangs his head in shame.

The principal places his hands together and waits for the two parents to sit before saying, “It seems Silver has caused quite the scene on the playground this afternoon.”

“It was my fault,” Jet speaks up suddenly, “I challenged him to a race. I told him to do it. If anyone should be to blame it’s me.”

The principal sighs, “Please, hold your tongue, Jet. We allow those kinds of activities on our playgrounds. We’ve already gotten that approved of. What we don’t have approved of are... powers.”

“Powers?” Sonic questions, glancing down at Silver and how his inhibitors flash every once in awhile in active bursts.

“I’m not at all familiar with...your kind, but...” The principal states as he sits back in his chair, “Teachers and students have witnessed Silver fly on his own and create this force that propelled a crowd of students back.”

Silver closes his eyes tighten. He can feel his father’s radiating eyes on him. He remembers the last time. Surprised and angry. All consuming infernos.

“Is everyone okay?” Sonic asks with concern.

“Fortunately, yes. Minor injuries,” the principal explains, “Although... we need to come up with a *solution*.”

Sonic gives him a nervous laugh, “What kind of solution?”

“Well,” the principal responds thoughtfully before stating, “As of right now, Silver is a liability to this school. So, I believe the best option would be to look elsewhere.”

“What!?” Sonic shouts as he gets to his feet, “That isn’t fair!” Sonic’s eyes widen when he sees Shadow get up. He thinks he’s going to join him, but Shadow walks around and takes Silver’s hand, guiding him out the door. “Shadow, what are you doing?”

Shadow keeps his back to him and says in a strangely calm tone, “There’s no reason to fight this. What’s done is done. This is the most logical option.”

Sonic just watches him in disbelief.

“Besides,” Shadow continues as he reaches for the door, “Silver made his choices. It would appear it’s time he learns from his mistakes.”

“It wasn’t his fault!” Jet shouts angrily, “He didn’t even know he had those kinds of powers! He didn’t do this on purpose! He didn’t have a choice!”

Silver is shaking his head, trying to signal Jet to stop arguing.

“He had a choice,” Shadow affirm with heat to his voice, “Associating with *you* was just one mistake on a long list he’s made.” He pulls open the door and slams it shut after he leaves.

Jet glares at the door before looking up at Sonic, “You’re going to fight this, right?”

Sonic is still eying the door as if wishing it would open again and he could reverse time so he could figure out a solution. He feels responsible for this. Shadow never wanted Silver to go to public school for this very reason. He had really thought it wouldn’t have been an issue, but he was wrong. About everything.

Sonic places his hand on Jet’s head and ruffles his feathers before forcing a smile for him, “Sometimes we just gotta know when to quit.”

Jet’s face drops when he sees Sonic fighting back tears before quickly making his way out the door. He goes to run after him, but he doesn’t have the energy to. He’d just let down his hero. He asked him to keep Silver safe and this is what he’d caused.

-

Shadow pushes through the door and doesn’t even get to the living room before shoving Silver into a chair at the kitchen table, “What were you thinking? I told you not to talk to that boy again and now look what has happened!”

“Jet had nothing to do with this,” Silver tries to defend himself.

“Do you really expect me to believe that it’s a coincidence that you, the moment upon meeting him, got yourself in trouble; and now while becoming ‘friends’ with him again you are in the same situation? Silver, you are *better* than this. You are better than that...” Shadow is having trouble

choosing from a long roster of names to call Jet, but settles with, “boy.”

“This situation was completely different,” Silver retorts with anger, “and I’m not better than Jet. I’m not better than any of my classmates.”

Sonic just lets out a loud sigh and makes his way over to the fridge, popping open a juice container, “Dude, lay off of the kid. You got what you wanted. He’s not in school anymore. Are you happy now?”

Shadow feels his nerves sizzle before he marches over to Sonic. He smacks the carton out of Sonic’s hand before he can even lift it to his mouth, “I *saw* this happening, but you had to get his hopes up and pretend like this would magically work out.”

Sonic sees his clothes get drenched with juice before the contents begin to pour onto the kitchen floor. He grabs it and throws it into the sink before getting in Shadow’s face, “What is your damage!? He made a mistake! You make mistakes *all the time!* Yet I’m not screaming and blaming you every five seconds for it!”

“The mistakes I make aren’t those I can’t see coming,” Shadow retorts, pushing Sonic back.

Sonic catches himself on the counter and he just shakes his head with a laugh, “Befriending a cultist follower? Yeah, okay. That’s so *unforeseeable*, Shads. At least I’m not dumb enough to do that.”

“I *handled* that!” Shadow responds as his fingers itch to grab something so he can squeeze the life out of it, “You, on the other hand, have put our son in danger by putting him into this school where you know for a fact human children are! You were practically setting him up for failure!”

“Enough!!!” Silver shouts, holding his ears tightly as he tries to block out their voices. He looks up and sees that he had physically pushed both his parents away from each other with his mind. He grabs his quills in panic and confusion, “What is happening to me!?”

Sonic exchanges a look with Shadow before making his way over to Silver. He gets onto his knees so he’s eyelevel with him and says, “Silver, you... have psychokinesis. You can move things with your mind.”

“*Sonic*,” Shadow grits out in a panic when he hears the words pouring out of his husband’s mouth.

“Oh, come on, dude. He *knows*,” Sonic says, rolling his eyes at him.

Silver gives his hands a confused look before he lifts his gaze to Shadow, “You knew about this.”

Shadow doesn’t look at him.

“You *did*,” Silver states in an accusing tone. He hops off the chair and makes his way over to Shadow, “It all makes sense now. You’re not trying to help me. You’re afraid of me. You’re afraid I’ll hurt others. You’re treating me like a bomb that’s going to blow up!”

“That isn’t true,” Shadow snarls out.

“Why else would you hide this from me? You could have like... worked with me to control this,” Silver states with bitter confusion.

“You weren’t ready and you still aren’t,” Shadow responds, his tone getting darker.

“Yes, I am,” Silver stomps his foot, the pulses flare off causing ripples in the spilled juice on the



floor.

Shadow is eying it, highly aware of it. His eyes narrow at Silver and he takes a step forward, towering over him, “No, you’re not. You are still young and impulsive. That, and do you really expect me to trust you after you have disobeyed me on multiple occasions?”

“Your rules are stupid and they don’t make sense,” Silver seethes as his hands begin to glow and his quills flutter like their weightless. The aura flows like water, but there’s sparks of electricity that flicker around him. He rushes forward, bracing his hands on his father’s torso trying to push him back with all of his might.

Shadow growls at Silver’s futile attempts to attack him before he grabs Silver’s wrists and pulls them behind him back. He pushes the kid against the ground, successfully restraining him.

Silver struggles in his grip, but he isn’t breaking free like he normally would, “Let go! Let go!!!”

Sonic gets up and holds his hands up like he’s still processing what’s happening.

Shadow fingers tighten around Silver’s wrists as he states, “The rules I make are to keep you *safe*. Everything I do is to protect you. Now, go to your room and think twice about the fights you pick with others.”

Shadow finally release’s Silver and Silver’s looking up at his father with tears in his eyes. He scurries across the floor and ducks away from Sonic’s outstretched arms so he can quickly run up the stairs.

Sonic winces when he hears the door slam and he stares at Shadow in astonishment, “Was that necessary? He’s a *kid*, Shadow!”

“He will choose his opponents wiser in the future,” is all Shadow says before taking a rag and cleaning up the mess on the ground.

Sonic grits his teeth and rips the rag out of his hand before pushing him up against the counter roughly. “Touch Silver again and *I’ll* be your opponent, Shadow,” Sonic threatens.

“If that is what it takes to teach him discipline,” Shadow remarks with the same heated anger, “Then, so be it!”

Sonic slowly backs away and shakes his head, “You’re raising a kid, not training a soldier.” He walks over to the stairs, but stops before saying, “Sleep on the couch, dude. I don’t even want to look at you right now.”

“If I must,” Shadow states, unmoving.

Sonic just gives him an ugly glare before stomping up the stairs.

Shadow winces when he hears the door slam, but he remains where he is. He will stand by his words. Silver was better than this and he will learn from it. He will do what he must to protect this family.

-

Silver stays in his room the rest of the day. His tears have long dried, but the anger, sadness, and humility still remain. He wonders if he should have just listened to his father after all.

He shakes his head. No, he wanted to be friends with Jet. Racing with him had nothing to do with

what had happened. If they would have just been open about him having powers, he would have known and avoided all of this.

He pulls his pillow closer and sniffs. All of this was a mess.

There's a tap at Silver's window. He mistakes it for a tree branch scratching at it, but then it happens again and again. He lifts his head up and walks over to the window, pulling it up. He gasps when a rock nearly hits him, but looks at it in awe when he sees that it's glowing teal and floating in front of him.

"Sorry," a hushed whisper says.

Silver looks down and sees Jet below him, "What are you doing here?"

"I'm busting you out," Jet responds as he motions to him.

Silver sighs and plucks the rock from the air before letting it fall back down to the ground, "I shouldn't... I'm in enough trouble..."

Jet gives him an angry look before allowing his board hover higher until he's face-to-face with Silver. He holds his hand out for him, "I'll have you home before anyone notices you're gone."

Silver looks hesitant, "Promise?"

Jet gives him a confident look as he draws an X across his chest, "I promise."

Silver nods and holds his arms out. He watches Jet fly in closer and he wraps his arms around Jet's neck as he carefully slides one foot over the windowsill and then the other. He wobbles a bit, but Jet grabs a hold of him and steadies him.

"You okay?" Jet asks.

Silver nods, his head still down, "It's just kind of high."

Jet nods before easing them back down toward the ground, "Better?"

Silver finally lifts his head up after he sees the hover board fluttering against the grass below them, "Yes. Thank you."

Under the moonlight, Silver's quills glitter like millions of prisms refracting light and his eyes shine like the most brilliant of gold. None of his family's heirlooms or treasures even come close to shining as brightly.

"Jet?" Silver asks in confusion.

"Let's run away," Jet says so suddenly even he isn't expecting it.

"What?" Silver asks with a humorous look.

"Let's just run away and like... go on adventures or something," Jet responds a bit more collectively, "Just you and me. We can get away from the school and the students and the Tidal Tempest and your father. We'll be rogues and travel the world. Like Sinbad!"

Silver tries not to laugh, "Jet, you have everything. You have fame and fortune. Why would you want to disappear and become a rogue?"

“It’s true. My family has everything. I’d just have to snap my fingers and whatever I wanted would appear in front of me, but... That isn’t the case with you. I can’t just buy you,” Jet looks away with embarrassment and finishes, “I’ve seen *a lot* of riches in my life, but you’re the rarest treasure I’ve ever come across, Silver.” Jet gets flustered and turns away, scrubbing his face with irritation, “And I know what you’re going to say! You’re going to laugh at me and call me a nerd or weird-o or...!”

“No,” Silver says like he’s almost speechless, “That’s the nicest thing anyone’s ever said to me.”

Jet’s mouth hangs open when he hears that.

“Let’s do it,” Silver announces with a big smile as he pulls Jet into a hug, “Let’s run away!”

Jet forces his finger to Silver’s lips, “Shh!” He looks around the house and sees that the lights are still out. He nods and motions for Silver to hold on before he darts away.

Silver looks back at his house as it gets smaller and smaller. They ride out and away from his neighborhood. He feels as giddy and excited as when he rode a board for the first time. This feels rebellious and freeing. It’s everything he wants right now. No more dumb rules or expectations. He can just be himself and be friends with Jet with no judgments.

Jet stops his hover board at the shoreline of the beach and he sits at the edge of it, expecting Silver to do the same. Instead, Silver lays across it with his legs hanging over Jet’s lap. Jet doesn’t move them either.

“I want to tell you something, but it’s kind of weird,” Jet says quietly.

“Tell me,” Silver responds excitedly as his arms hang off the board carelessly, “Let’s be weird! Tell me all of your weird thoughts! I want to hear them all! We’re free now and no one can tell us we can’t be weird anymore!”

Jet finds himself smiling at that before it disappears, “You weren’t even supposed to be able to ride our gear. Only descendants of the Ancient Babylonians are able to make them work. And then, you made your own board and...”

Silver sits up with big, wide eyes, “Are you saying I’m a descendant too? That’s cool!”

“I don’t think you’re a descendant,” Jet informs with a frown.

Silver’s shoulder sag a little, “Aw...”

“I’m not sure how, but... I think you’re the bird-like deity we used to worship,” Jet says a bit nervously.

Silver giggles at him, “I’m not a *bird*. I’m a hedgehog!”

“I know!” Jet responds with anger before cooling himself down, “I know... but...” He fidgets his fingers together, like he isn’t sure where to start. He flinches when he feels Silver’s hand on top of his and he turns to see Silver looking back at him.

“Just tell me what’s on your mind,” Silver says.

Jet hesitantly nods, but when he goes to open his mouth he hears his name being called.

“Jet! Jee-eet! Jet, where are you!?”

Jet tenses when he sees his sister making her way over.

Jet jumps onto his feet quickly almost flipping Silver over, but before he can dart off she's grabbing him by the back of the head. He falls back and Silver and his board go spiraling the other way.

"Where have you been!? We've been worried sick! The maid is like two seconds away from calling the police!" Wave scolds as she begins dragging him across the beach.

Jet fights back and pulls away, "No."

"What?" Wave asks with an expectant look.

"I'm not going back," Jet declares with all seriousness.

Wave gives him a confused look, "Excuse me?" When she sees movement behind Jet, she glares at it, "Well, if it isn't Silver the Killer."

"Is that what they're calling me now?" Silver asks with a glare of his own as he hands Jet his board back.

"Pretty fitting, right?" Wave says with a laugh before addressing her brother again, "Come on, Jet. Enough fooling around. Let's go."

Jet doesn't move, "I meant it. I'm not going back."

"Then, where exactly are you going to go?" Wave asks with her hands on her hips.

Jet just glances at the ground as the waves lick at the soles on his shoes. He opens and closes his hand a few times before slowly reaching over to grab Silver's hand. He finally looks up at her and states, "Wherever the wind takes me."

Wave just starts laughing.

"Come on, Silver," Jet whispers to him before turning and walking away.

"Wait," Wave looks stunned, "You're serious?" When he doesn't stop, she stomps her foot on the ground, "Jet, get back here!"

Jet is through listening. He throws his board down and motions for Silver to sit at the front before he gets on and they're gone, leaving Wave in their dust.

They travel a ways down the shoreline until they come across a small rocky structure. It appears to be a small cavern or oasis. It isn't any bigger than a tree house and in the middle is a reflective pool of water from the ocean, but it's somewhere hidden away where they can be alone.

"I actually told her no," Jet responds like he can't believe it.

"So? What's the big deal?" Silver asks with a slight grin.

"I don't know? I just... always went along with her and now it's..." Jet tries to explain, but falls short.

"It's liberating? Making your own decisions for once?" Silver tries to offer.

"Yeah, I guess. Kind of scary too," Jet whispers as he tucks his knees into his chest.

Silver nods in agreement.

“I was expecting more from Sonic... I thought he was going to fight back and save the day and... I was hoping things would turn out okay,” Jet says in a defeated tone, “You came back to school the last time.”

“Last time?” Silver replies with a laugh, “Last time I was at my father’s own mercy. Ultimately, my dad agreed with him.”

“What!?” Jet asks like he can’t believe it.

“When it comes to me, my dad is a little finicky. A lot of the time, he’s like a kid himself. I feel like we get along so well because we’re like best friends more than anything. He has his moments though, but...” Silver just shrugs and sighs, “It’s hard to find balance between my father and my dad. I always feel like I’m in this tug o’ war battle between growing up too fast and not growing up fast enough.”

Jet nods like he understands, “Yeah, they tell you to enjoy being a kid while you can because you have your whole life to be a crummy old adult, but it seems like everyone’s just impatient and wants you to be an adult already. ‘You need to be ready for this’ or ‘You need to prepare yourself for that.’ All of that garbage.”

Silver laughs a little, “I thought I was the only one who felt that way.” Silver stretches a little. The rocky ground is starting to make his butt go numb.

“Here,” Jet offers as he slides his board over for the both of them to sit on.

“Thank you,” Silver says with appreciation. There’s a quiet moment of silence before Silver asks, “Why are you so obsessed with my dad?”

“Have you even seen the footage of Sonic the Hedgehog saving the city?!” Jet asks as if Silver should know.

Silver just kind of shrugs, “I mean, I know he used to fight for freedom and stuff.”

Jet gets to his feet in front of Silver as he explains with enthusiasm, “There was this water monster destroying the city. It completely flooded the streets and everything. Station Square was in complete ruins. Everyone thought that was it. They thought they were all goners, but out of nowhere this bright light shoots across the sky. His body was completely gold and his quills were spiked up!”

Silver cocks an eye at him, “You sure you’re not talking about my father?”

“No way!” Jet shakes his head, “It was the one and only Sonic the Hedgehog. He flew through the air and tore apart the monster, belly up! It exploded like fireworks in the sky and everyone was cheering his name!”

“...But, how?” Silver asks, not understanding.

“He used the seven Chaos Emeralds,” Jet tells him, “They’re miracle gems that give power to those that know how to wield it. It’s like... compressed solar energy that recharges on its own. Some say they were blessed by the gods.”

“Weird,” Silver says with a quirked smirk, “What happened to them?”

“I don’t know? They mysteriously disappeared before I was even born,” Jet states as he paces back and forth, “but that was my first clue that Sonic couldn’t be our deity. Apparently it could fly and could recharge its energy on its own. It didn’t need the Chaos Emeralds. It was already complete.”

“But you still followed him,” Silver points out smugly.

“Yeah,” Jet nods, “but then I met you and you could power our extreme gear, you made your own board, and you could fly without even using it. You *are* that solar energy. That’s what your body is made of.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Silver responds, kicking his feet back and forth.

Jet places his hand on his hips and smirks at him, “My ancestors have been searching thousands and thousands of years for silver and gold, but I’m the only one who actually found the real thing. That’s why I’m going to protect you no matter what.”

“Silver... and gold?” Silver asks in confusion.

Jet nods to him.

“That doesn’t make any sense... I’m eight and your ancestors are thousands and thousands of years old. How could they be looking for me when I wasn’t born yet?” Silver wonders out loud.

“I don’t know? *You’re* the celestial deity not me,” Jet responds before turning to sit back down on his hover board.

Silver rubs his head in annoyance, “Today I learn I have powers, get kicked out of school, and now I’m some ancient bird god?” He sighs and presses the back of his head against the cavern wall, “I wish I could go back home and ask my dad. I have so many questions...”

“Is that what you want?” Jet asks with a frown.

“Yes,” Silver blurts out before shaking his head, “I mean, no...” He scrubs his forehead in anger and lets out an irritated noise, “I don’t know!?”

Jet sighs and pulls himself back onto his feet. He holds his hand out to Silver.

Silver opens his eyes and sees it in front of him. He gives Jet a confused look.

“If we leave now, you won’t get the answers you want,” Jet says with a tinge of embarrassment, “and I don’t want you regretting that for the rest of your life.”

Silver gives him a soft smile before placing his hand into Jet’s, “Thank you...”

“That and... I kind of want to know too,” Jet murmurs quietly.

Silver’s smile widens when he hears that, “You’ll be the first one to know.”

Jet nods and pulls Silver back onto his feet. They get on the board and fly back toward town. They reach Silver’s neighborhood again and Jet makes sure he gets back into his bedroom. He waves good-bye and looks up, watching the window slide shut. He gasps when he hears the sliding door open and Jet barrels into the nearest bush.

He keeps his breath steady as he sees the red outlines of Shadow’s silhouette in the darkness and those burning red inferno eyes when he glances in Jet’s direction. Jet holds his breath, his knees shaking, but Shadow slowly shuts the door and the hawk nearly collapses out of relief.

He ducks out of there and back onto the streets before darting away. He was hoping to leave for good tonight because now... he has an annoying sister to go home to and a long day of school ahead of him.



## Promise



### Chapter Twenty-Six: Promise

Silver purposefully doesn't leave his room until noon. Besides avoiding an awkward house, he has other things floating through his mind. His father was prone to keeping things from him, but now his dad? It didn't help his case of wanting to run away, but he wants answers first. He knows he won't get them from Shadow, but maybe he could ease them out of Sonic.

There's a knock on his door and Silver gets up suddenly with a gasp.

Sonic slowly opens the door and sees Silver on the bed with teddy bear floating in the air as if ready to attack him. Sonic lets out an overdramatic wail as he says, "Oh no! Stuffed animals! My only weakness!"

Silver just shakes his head before grabbing the stuff toy and tossing it at him.

Sonic lets out a melodramatic squeal as it lightly hits his chest and he falls to the ground like an underpaid actor, "I'm no match for the Ultimate Life Form!"

Silver has to crack a smile at his dad's antics, but he shakes it off before hopping off the bed, "There's merit to your words...isn't there, dad?"

Sonic freezes in place when he hears that and he sits cross-legged on the ground with the stuffed bear in his lap. He rubs the back of his neck nervously before sighing, "Yeah, kind of."

"Hidden in plain sight," Silver crosses his arms over his chest and shakes his head, "Unbelievable."

Sonic scoots into the room and closes the door behind him, "That isn't your life though. We're



giving you the option to live how you want to. On your own terms. You can be so much more than that.”

Silver gives him a confused look as he asks, “but isn’t that still part of who I am?” He looks down at the rings around his wrists, “That’s why I wear these and I’m told not to remove them. They’re like shackles.”

Sonic gives him a look of shock as he gets up suddenly, the bear falling out of his lap as he does so, “No! It’s not like that at all, Silver. I never saw them as shackles. They’re more like...” Sonic takes a moment to collect his thoughts as he smooths hand down his quills, “Ya know how I take medicine to like... make myself less jittery and help me focus? Well, those are kind of the same thing. Your powers are overactive and you wouldn’t function properly without them.”

“What happens when I don’t have them?” Silver asks.

“I’m not really sure,” Sonic responds.

“Dad,” Silver demands.

Sonic holds his hands up and takes a step back, “I’m serious! I don’t know? We never wanted to. There was no need for it, but... If I had to take a wild guess, I’d say you’d start burning energy really fast and wipe yourself out. Kinda like when I drink too much coffee.”

Silver tries not to laugh, but he can’t help it. There’s just too many instances where Sonic’s done just that resulting in him falling asleep in awkward positions. Most of which are him face first his is own puddle of drool.

“There’s that smile,” Sonic points out, eyes softening a bit. He scoops Silver into his arms and sits on the bed with the kid in his lap. He runs his fingers through Silver’s forehead quills and says, “Silver, I just want you to know that I love you very much.”

Silver nods, leaning into his dad’s touch. Everything feels a bit more subdued now. Less hectic. Yet, he knows there’s a storm looming over them. “Do you know anything about Ancient Babylonians?” Silver asks curiously.

“Ancient...what?” Sonic’s hand stops for a moment with an arched eyebrow.

Silver sighs with a frown. He can tell his dad is being sincere. He wouldn’t know what he and Jet were talking about last night. Maybe he came back home for nothing.

Sonic sees the disappointed look on Silver’s face and tries to suggest, “Well... *I* don’t know much about ancient stuff, but I know a certain echidna who does!”

Silver’s eyes light up, “May I please speak with Uncle Knuckles!?”

Sonic winces a little, “I mean... if you can get Shad-Dad on board with...” Sonic watches as the kid practically leaps out of his lap and out the door, “...it?”

Silver stealthily makes his way downstairs. He peers over the railing and sees Shadow at the kitchen table with cup of coffee and a newspaper in his hand. He ducks back down and shimmies down the steps before rolling into the living room. He slides his back against the counter and glances from behind it.

“I know you’re there, Silver,” Shadow murmurs before folding the newspaper and placing it to the side.

Silver winces. How does he do that every time? There was no sneaking up on him. Silver tries to shake the anxiety away from his body with a deep breath of air before marching out into the kitchen. He stands with his feet together and he bows his head, "I'd like to apologize for my behavior last night."

Shadow sighs and turns in his seat so he's facing the kid. He crosses one leg over the other and asks, "I highly doubt that. I can't name one instance where you've apologized so quickly. Drop the charade and just clarify what you want."

Silver lifts his head enough to give him a small pout, "Why do you always think I want something from you? What if I truly learned my lesson?"

"If you truly were, you would not be absent from your room last night," Shadow states gruffly.

Silver gives him a look of horror.

"One of your 'powers' is that you are connected with me. You know where I am at and I know the exact same," Shadow explains to him, "You cannot sneak around without me knowing."

That would have been nice to know last night. Otherwise, he wouldn't have gone out with Jet. Although with how many times he's 'known' Shadow was coming home, he probably should have figured that out by now.

"This is your first offense. I will let it slide. Do not continue to do so or there will be consequences," Shadow informs him.

Silver hardens his face and bows his head lower, "I promise, father. I will listen to you and obey your rules. I now know they are there to protect me. Please, allow me one favor in return."

Shadow rests his fist to his cheek and motions him to continue.

"I would like to visit Uncle Knuckles and Aunt Rouge on Angel Island today," Silver requests, head still bowed.

Shadow is silent as if thinking it over. His eyes are distant for a moment before giving in, "Very well."

Silver lifts his head slightly with a smile on his face.

"Take a shower first," Shadow says with disgust, "You reek of low tide."

"Y-yes, father!" Silver darts away before Shadow can put together that he was at the beach after sunset. He zips past Sonic on his way up and quickly says, "We're going to Angel Island!" The bathroom door slams shut before Sonic can get a word in.

Sonic just shakes his head and smirks. The kid played Shadow like a fucking fiddle.

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"Well, well, well... Look who it is. The Ultimate Jerk finally decided to show his face," is the first thing out of Knuckles' mouth when he opens the door to the three.

Rouge's voice comes from the other room, "Exactly how long have you been back and you haven't returned any of my calls?"

Shadow just rolls his eyes, knowing this is what he'd inevitably walk into the moment he decided to

visit. He ignores Knuckles and makes his way into their home, "Omega gives his regards as well."

Rouge huffs, "I doubt it. Last time I got a signal from him was weeks ago. Is GUN giving him a spa treatment or something?"

Shadow's breath gets caught in his throat. Omega... He hadn't adjusted his memory chip yet and was still offline. He had almost forgotten all about that with the other chaos happening around him. He takes a seat on the sofa across from Rouge and decides on scolding her instead, "Why are you hacking into GUN databases anyway? You're on leave."

She just gives him a curt smile and flutters her eyelashes a little, "Who? Me? I'd never do something like that. Although I probably wouldn't need to if you would stop disappearing on me."

"Get your mind off work," Shadow retorts with a frown, "You're beginning to obsess over it."

Rouge just laughs and crosses her leg over the other, "Isn't that just like you. You're the pot calling the kettle black."

"As fitting as that metaphor is, I have my reasons," Shadow murmurs back.

"Of course you do. You *always* do," Rouge responds with exasperation. She watches Sonic sit down on the couch with Shadow, but there's a little bit of space between them. She doesn't call them out on this just waves at him, "Hello again, big blue. It's always nice to see you."

Shadow glances at the door before asking, "Where is Silver?"

Sonic leans back against the couch like he's exhausted, "Dude, chill. He's with knucklehead. You know how he wants to get a taste of being a dad and junk. The kid isn't on house arrest, ya know."

Shadow just looks away, saying nothing in response.

"Oh my," Rouge says, "Am I sensing some tension?"

Sonic just scoffs, "Just a day in the life."

Shadow glances back at Sonic with a grim look, "Do not act as if this is the norm."

"Well, I dunno? It's starting to feel like it," Sonic responds rather tightly.

"If you're so adamant on being right, perhaps it will stay this way," Shadow remarks sharply.

Sonic kicks his foot out and turns his whole body toward Shadow, "It better not! I wanna live in a *home* not a penitentiary!"

"Easy, children," Rouge leans over, holding her hands out to them like she's ready to break them up, "What has gotten into you two?"

Shadow merely sighs and gets up, placing a hand on hers. He eases her back down on the chair.

She sighs, "You're almost as bad as my husband when it comes to this."

"You know that isn't true," Shadow remarks as he remains by her side instead, not wanting his personal scuffle with Sonic bring her any stress.

"He restrained Silver! Like, both hands against his back and face to the floor. Police style," Sonic says in accusation, "I'm supposed to be okay with that?"

“I had to,” Shadow responds with a frown, “He was out of control.”

“So? He’s a *kid!*” Sonic retorts with anger.

“He is a child wielding a body that can invoke harm onto others,” Shadow explains, “And now, he is cognitively aware that he can.”

Rouge snaps her head up to look at Shadow, “You told him?”

“He found out on his own,” Shadow responds mournfully.

“So what?” Sonic says impatiently, “It wasn’t his fault. He didn’t mean to do it.”

“In the eye of the law, do you think that matters?” Shadow grits out.

“I mean, yeah. It’s gotta, right?” Sonic asks more than says.

“Can you not see we were lucky by the end result of this? Far worse could have happened than him losing his privilege—and yes, I say *privilege*—to attend public school. He could have been put into juvenile hall. We could have been kicked out of the United Federation entirely. Or he could have been taken from us,” Shadow states with stoic professionalism.

“You’re being ridiculous,” Sonic says like he’s getting fed up, “Remember when I called him a weapon and you freaked out on me? Why is this any different?”

“That’s different,” Shadow remarks, “I never wanted him to be put in this kind of situation. I was ready and prepared for him to develop in a more *controlled* environment.”

“Ya know, every time you say that all I’m hearing is ‘A *lonely* environment’,” Sonic grumbles out.

“He wouldn’t be without love,” Shadow explains, “You are acting like I want to put him in a laboratory setting and that is not the case. He would still have his freedom.”

“You’re hurting him with all of these rules, dude,” Sonic states as he gets to his feet.

“You are hurting him by not acting like a *father*,” Shadow responds, coldly.

Rouge looks between the two and gets up slowly, “I’ll... uh... go make some tea.” She slips out of the living room and into the kitchen.

Sonic makes sure Rouge leaves the room before he asks, “Do you really feel that way? That I’m not doing enough? I gave up *everything* to do this. I help him with his homework. I make sure I’m there to pick him up when he’s sick. I take care of him after you get into your fights with him. Is that not enough for you?”

“The outcome speaks for itself, Sonic,” Shadow simply says.

Sonic’s chest clenches. He feels the tears pricking at the corners of his eyes, but he takes a deep breath in. He holds his hands up in defeat, “Fine.” He just walks out, shutting the door behind him.

“Daddy! Daddy! Watch!” Silver shouts to him. He gets a running start and glides toward Knuckles and Knuckles tosses him in the air. Silver spins around and floats softly back to the ground. He lands on his feet and holds his hands out with excitement, “Did you see!?”

Sonic just glances at him before turning and walking away, “That’s nice, kiddo...”

Knuckles gives him a weird look, “Where’re you goin’?”

“Just for a walk,” Sonic holds his hand up to wave him off before continuing down the path that leads to the altar.

Knuckles scratches his head, not used to Sonic’s glum demeanor.

Silver doesn’t take much notice to it. Instead, pulls on the cuff of Knuckles’ glove, “I wanted to ask you something. You used to travel the world and discover ancient ruins, right?”

Knuckles beats his large fist against his chest and gives him a proud look, “Why, yes. Yes, I did. Some people call me the best treasure hunter in the world.”

“Have you ever heard of the Ancient Babylonians?” Silver asks, with wide eyes.

Knuckles opens his mouth and puffs his chest out before taking a moment, “...Babylonians huh?”

Silver nods in affirmation.

“Let’s see...” Knuckles drawls out while rubbing his chin as he racks his brain for a moment.

“Um...” Silver steps sideways into Knuckles’ vision and adds, “They were birds who worshiped a celestial bird-like deity?”

“Oh!” Knuckles snaps his fingers like he’s had an epiphany, “You’re talking about the Astral Gardens!”

Silver jumps up and down with excitement, “Do you know where it is?!”

“Yep,” Knuckles says confidently before wavering, “Well... kind of. I’ve never been there myself.”

“What? Why?” Silver asks.

“According to legend, it was a spaceship that crash landed to earth,” Knuckles explains, “It fell in a desert and remains there buried underneath the sand. No one’s actually uncovered it.”

“Spaceship?” Silver questions. That sounded weird. Jet never mentioned anything about that.

“Oh yeah. My people came across some Astral relics at Gigan Rocks. The technology was far superior to that of the echidna tribe that there’s no way they were from earth,” Knuckles concludes, “It’s even far more advance than our present day technology. Apparently they could use the sun to power any and all of their machinery. Almost like magic.”

“Solar energy,” Silver whispers as he looks down at his hands.

Knuckles glances at him and asks, “You say something?”

Silver gives Knuckles a determined look, “Is it possible that the Ancient Babylonians actually predate your people and all of their technology got lost to the test of time therefore life had to start from scratch?” Silver scratches his head and murmurs, “Wait... That doesn’t make sense. You said it crash landed. It’s physically impossible for land masses to just float on their own.”

Knuckles’ eyes grow wide as if the kid had just blown his mind.

“Uncle Knuckles?”

“Futuristic... Ancient technology,” Knuckles begins to ponder quietly. He paces back and forth before stopping to squint at Silver’s inhibitors. He gives them a suspicious look before kneeling down to Silver’s eye-level. He gives him a broad smile before saying, “Come with me. I want to try something.”

Silver nods and takes Knuckles hand as they walk off in the direction Sonic went in.

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Rouge returns to the living room with three mugs of steaming tea, but notices there’s only one guest sitting on the couch. She decides to sit with him as she places the drinks on the table, “You chase off blue?”

Shadow just glances at her like she accused him of murder. He takes one of the mugs and lets it warm his hands.

“Whatever you two are fighting about isn’t worth it,” Rouge explains calmly, “I know you two butt heads like two stubborn rams fighting for dominance, but you’re in a relationship. That stuff was all fine and dandy while you were rivals, but now you have to work together.”

“Thank you for the Saturday morning special,” Shadow responds bitterly.

Rouge looks put off by Shadow’s behavior. She decides to take a different approach. “Our jobs are very... demanding,” she explains collectively, “I realize that I’m not going to be there for my child as much as I should and that’s why I need Knuckles. Yes, he’s over protective and eccentric, but I chose to marry him and I chose to start my life with him. Sometimes the flaws we see in others aren’t flaws at all. Something someone does might not be logical to you, but it does serve a purpose somewhere else.”

Shadow gazes down at his drink with a pensive look.

Rouge smirks because she knows that look.

“I really didn’t want all of this following me here,” Shadow says in sadly, “That’s precisely why I’ve been avoiding this.”

“Please, burden me with your petty bickering. It’ll give me *something* to do other than googling how to knit before realizing that I hate knitting,” Rouge explains with a bored look as she rests her hand to her cheek.

“Honestly, these fights are the least of my worries that’s why I’m so fed up with them,” Shadow sits back and folds his arms over his chest, “If he’d just listen and follow orders everything would be fine.”

Rouge sighs and shakes her head, “Not everyone is going to follow your command, Shadow. Sometimes people have their own agendas. You’re lucky Omega and I pretend like you’re in charge.”

“I learned that firsthand,” Shadow responds with a grim look before admitting quietly, “I miss you. I hadn’t realized how much you managed to keep the team together.”

“You’re *finally* realizing that?” Rouge says with a laugh, “If I weren’t there you and Omega would be running around aimlessly, doing whatever you wanted.”

Shadow turns away with shame, “Yeah...”

Rouge hates seeing him so down in the dumps. She pats him on the back and reassures him, “You’re still the team leader. I don’t have the patience to be barking orders all the time and taking responsibility for my actions. You hold a pivotal role too. You guys are just working a little harder because Team Dark isn’t running on all cylinders. Don’t get discouraged. Besides, I’ll be back before you know it and you’ll be droning on and on about how you wish I weren’t there.”

“Surely you’ve heard of my,” Shadow begins to say before finishing quietly, “failures.”

“Shadow,” Rouge says with an exasperated look, “We all mess stuff up. We all have failed missions once in awhile. Don’t put such high expectations on you or anyone else. It’s crippling.”

Shadow sits in silence and lets Rouge’s words sink in for a moment. Perhaps he was forcing too much of the blame onto Sonic’s shoulders. Shadow is well aware that the situation has put a tremendous amount of stress onto him, but he shouldn’t be taking it out on his husband of all people.

Shadow stands up and places a hand onto Rouge’s shoulder, “Would you excuse me for a moment?”

Rouge takes out her phone and scrolls through it, “Take all the time you need, hon. I’ll just be here looking up the difference between knitting and crocheting.”

Shadow just shakes his head and lets out a small laugh before making his way out the door.

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“Whoa! What *is* that?” Silver asks with big, sparkly eyes.

“This,” Knuckles motions to the large altar, “is where I spent most of my life. I was guardian of the Master Emerald, you know.”

“What’s that?” Silver questions, tugging on Knuckles’ glove.

Knuckles goes to open his mouth again, but Sonic cuts him off. Apparently he’s already sitting on the steps of the altar, “Knux, seriously? Take your tour guide somewhere else. Can you not get the hint that I want to be alone for a little bit?”

Knuckles looks up at the top and shields his eyes from the sun, but finally spots him, “Oh, hey! I was wondering where you ran off to.”

“Not many places to go, knucklehead. It’s an island after all,” Sonic says sarcastically.

Silver is stifling his laughter at his uncle’s nickname.

It completely flies over Knuckles’ head though. He guides Silver up the steps and makes his way toward the center of the altar, “I just want to try something out. It appears Silver has many gifted talents.”

Sonic sighs and rubs his eyes a little before lounging back, forfeiting his alone time because he knows he won’t get it. “Yep. Silver’s special alright,” Sonic agrees, although he’s not looking at either one of them.

Knuckles positions Silver right at the center where the Master Emerald once stood, “Let me tell you a little about the Master Emerald. It was the controller of the seven Chaos Emeralds. Now, the Chaos Emeralds are...”

Silver finishes excitedly like he can’t contain himself, “...miracle gems that give power to those that

know how to wield it? It's compressed solar energy that recharges on its own? And they were blessed by the gods?!"

Sonic's ears perk up when he hears that and he slowly turns to look at Silver.

Knuckles gives Silver a small noogie and has an impressed smile on his face, "Wow! Very good! Sonic taught you well."

Sonic remains silent, but he sees the sheepish look Silver is giving him.

"When the Chaos Emeralds fall into the wrong hands, the result can be detrimental. That's why there's the Master Emerald. It can neutralize the Chaos Emeralds' power," Knuckles explains further.

"Really?" Silver asks with wide-eyed wonder, "Where are they?"

"Alright, enough questions," Sonic cuts in with a wave of his hand, "Just do your little tour and bring Silver back."

"Aw..." Silver gives him a disappointed look.

"In a minute," Knuckles states before turning back to Silver, "You were talking about floating landmasses earlier. Well, I think it's possible that pieces of land could float on their own."

"Really?" Silver questions curiously, "Have you ever seen one?"

Knuckles nods with a proud look, "That's how Angel Island got its name. An island that resides in the heavens."

"Wow," Silver looks around like he can barely believe it.

"I'd like to try something, if you think you're up to it," Knuckles says with a confident smile.

Silver nods quickly to him.

"Okay. Place your palms on the ground," Knuckles directs him.

Silver does as he's told, both palms pressed against the stone below him, "Like this?"

"Perfect," Knuckles responds with a nod.

"Now what?" Silver asks.

"Just stay like that," Knuckles replies before standing in front of him. He raises his hands up and closes his eyes. "The servers are the seven Chaos. Chaos is power. Power enriched by the heart. The controller is the one that unifies the Chaos," Knuckles chants quietly.

For a moment, nothing happens. It's dead silent, but then Silver's rings begin to start glowing brilliantly. He gasps as he looks around and feels the earth around him move. The gravity shifts slowly and the landmass begins to pull itself out of the water and all of the birds nesting in the trees get scared and fly away. Silver just watches in awe as a smile reaches his lips.

"Enough!" Sonic shouts in anger.

Suddenly, the island falls back down, the water around it disturbed as waves creep up and away from it.



Sonic stomps over to Silver and pulls him off the stone pedestal. Silver glances down at his hands that are still glowing and sees the green glow from his dad's chest. Sonic self-consciously places his hand over it to hide it, but it's still glowing against his hand. He glares at Knuckles and says, "Dude, stop it. This is my kid, not your dumb rock."

"Um..." Knuckles glares back at him with his hands on his hips, "He just wanted me to answer some questions. It wasn't like I was going to make him stand there forever. I just wanted to show him a floating island."

"Yeah, well, I'm the one who has to deal with Shadow's bad attitude later. So, can you knock off all this...Master Emerald stuff?" Sonic says with offense.

"It's true," Silver whispers to him and looks up at his dad who is staring back at him suddenly, "I'm a celestial god, aren't I?"

Sonic takes a step back for a moment and gives Silver a look of terror. He slowly places Silver back onto his feet.

Footsteps are heard as they quickly make themselves up to the altar. Shadow appears a moment later and he asks, "The island. It moved. What...?" He stops when he sees Sonic locking eyes with him.

"I didn't..." Sonic starts to whisper, but he can't get it out. He needs to leave. He needs to get out of there. Sonic runs past Shadow and feels the impulse to just *leave*. Run away as fast as he can. He doesn't care where. Just anywhere.

The moment Shadow goes to grip Sonic's shoulder, they both vanish from thin air.

Silver's eyes widen when he sees that and he quickly runs over to the spot they once were. "What?" Silver asks, feeling around the ground for some sort of trap door or something, "What happened? Where'd they go?"

Knuckles sighs. He makes his way over to the kid and holds his hand out, "They'll be okay. Let's head back. I got some cool artifacts you can look at."

Silver gets to his feet and slowly nods. He takes Knuckles' hand and as they walk away, he can't help but glance back.

What was that?

-

Shadow barely has enough time to get his bearings before the ground under him turns from stone to lush flowers. And luckily, it's the lush flowers he ends up falling upon. He shakes his senses back before he's pulling himself up onto his feet again. He knows where they are. The field of flowers they used to frequent when they'd first gotten Silver. It's been awhile since he's been here though.

"Can't anyone just take a hint?"

"Sonic," Shadow says softly before taking a step forward.

"Get out of here!" Sonic snaps, his back still facing Shadow as his hands are curled tightly into fists.

Shadow sighs and remains where he is, "I want to apologize for..."

"For what!?" Sonic grits out, shoulders bobbing as he's fighting off the spasms of his diaphragm,

“For being right!?”

“That isn’t...”

“I don’t want your half-assed excuses,” Sonic cuts him off with a bitter laugh, “Why is *anyone* surprised that I’m not a good dad when the first thing I said when I even laid eyes on Silver is that I wouldn’t be!? The bar was pretty low for me already!”

Shadow winces at that, “Sonic, you’re not...”

“Shut up!!!” Sonic shouts with anger.

Shadow does as he’s told.

“You’re not even supposed to be here,” Sonic murmurs quietly, “I’m so tired of feeling tied down... I’m tired of not having any space... I’m tired of not being *me* anymore...”

Shadow looks down and away.

“I’m not *Sonic* anymore. I’m either your husband or Silver’s dad or... ‘Mr. the Hedgehog’ or whatever. I’m Chaos. I’m a god. I’m a god who’s raising another god,” Sonic drones on, his voice sounding broken and empty, “I just wanna be alone.”

Shadow’s eyes rest on Sonic once more and he thinks he gets it, “You just need a vacation. I can request that you...”

“No, I don’t need a vacation,” Sonic responds through gritted teeth, “I need out. I need my life back. I feel like I’m suffocating.”

Shadow raises an eyebrow at him, “What are you saying?”

“I was hurt and heartbroken when I thought you were cheating on me, but like... I kind of thought about it,” Sonic says carefully.

Shadow’s eyes widen when he realizes what he’s getting at, “You don’t really mean that.” Shadow grits his teeth and takes a step forward before pulling Sonic around to face him, “You are not leaving me again!” Shadow gives Sonic a stunned look when he sees the tears on his face, dripping and falling freely and that calm, relieved smile.

“Does it matter?” Sonic’s lips twitch as he lets out a small, sad laugh, “My best isn’t good enough and we both know that. I’m no good at this. Now that I’m not in the way, you can figure all of this out. You can call the shots and give Silver the care he deserves. We need to do what’s best for him and if this isn’t working...”

Shadow feels his breath hitching as he mutters, “S-Sonic...”

“It’s selfish to keep this up if we’re not... ya know, really committed to it,” Sonic responds before slowly backing away from Shadow’s touch, “I think it’d be best for both of us. We both get what we want this way.”

“I... I don’t want...” Shadow starts to say as he looks down at Sonic’s hand and how he’s slipping the ring off.

Sonic gazes down at his finger and how the imprint of the ring is still there. He flexes his fingers as if getting used to the feeling and his smile widens.

All of the words Shadow wants to say gets stuck in his throat because he can see just how genuinely happy Sonic is right now. It hurts. More than anything. But he doesn't have the heart to stop him if this is what he really wants.

He swallows down his feelings and whispers, "Go."

Sonic looks up at him, taking in this moment.

"I want you to be free," Shadow tells him with a disheartened look, "I don't want to hold you back any longer."

Sonic nods and leans in to place a kiss on Shadow's lips. It's fleeting and doesn't last as long as Shadow would have hoped. He goes to reach out and try to savor it, but his hands fall and he allows Sonic to pull away.

Sonic is gone and Shadow is back at the altar. Alone.

Shadow lets out a breath of air and does his best to march down the steps. His legs are strong at first, but falter once he gets to the bottom.

He let him go. He actually let him go.

His chest tightens with an unbearable pain and his knees buckle midstride.

Sonic was gone. He held onto him too tightly and now he's...

Shadow lowers his head and presses his forehead against the grass and whispers, "Please, come back..." He's hoping, praying that it doesn't end like this. This couldn't be the end. It couldn't end that quickly.

Shadow gets back onto unstable footing and continues the path down to the small home. He makes his way inside and sees Knuckles flaunting a few miscellaneous relics and Silver is looking at them in awe. Shadow allows Knuckles to finish his small piece of show-and-tell before Shadow directs his voice to his son, "Come on, Silver. It's time to go."

"Aw..." Silver pouts, but gets up anyway. He bows politely to Knuckles and says, "Maybe I can come back sometime and look at the rest."

"It would be an honor," Knuckles responds with a smile.

Silver smiles back and makes his way over to his father and waves them off.

"I expect to see you again, Shadow," Rouge instructs him, "Hopefully your visit can be less sparse."

Shadow just nods back before walking out the door. He can hear Rouge's distasteful sigh. She had expected a response at the very least, but Shadow doesn't really have it in him to do so.

They make their way down toward the bridge before Silver asks, "Where's dad?"

Shadow goes to open his mouth, but realizes he doesn't know how to answer that question. Sonic hadn't told him what to say. Although that probably isn't Sonic's problem anymore. Shadow just looks a little lost before he states, "We'll talk about this when we get home."

Silver looks back at the island and frowns. He hopes he's not still on it somewhere. He still doesn't know what that flash of light was or how his parents just vanished like that.

-

The moment they walk into the home, it's quiet. Silver doesn't see his dad's shoes on the mat as he slipping his own shoes off, "Is he coming home later?"

Shadow remains quiet. He walks into the kitchen instead and rummages through one of the drawers. He has to remind himself to clean it out. It's gotten really cluttered over the years.

Silver gets angry at Shadow's silence and marches up to him, "What time will he be back?"

Shadow kneels down in front of Silver with a small chain is in his hand. Silver eyes it and how the metal kind of sparkles in the sunlight. He gives his father a confused look.

"Silver," Shadow says carefully, "When I promise something, I don't ever break that promise. I want you to know that."

Silver kind of laughs a little, but he's looking at his father with concern, "Of course. I know that."

Shadow nods and slips the ring from his finger onto the gold chain. He hooks it around Silver's neck and whispers, "I promise that I will never leave you."

Silver just stays stone still for a long moment as he takes in his father's words. He looks at Shadow's now bare finger and then down at his chest where the necklace is hanging. He thinks he's starting to understand, but he doesn't really want to. "Father..." Silver says with a tremble to his voice, "You're scaring me."

"Things will be strange for awhile, but..." Shadow stops like he's trying to keep his voice in control before he continues, "but we'll get through this."

"No," Silver responds as he shakes his head, "No, father. Stop it." Silver furrows his brow in confusion before demanding, "When is he coming back!?"

"Silver..."

"Where is he!?" Silver asks with anger, "L-let's go get him! He needs to come home!" Silver's lips trembles and his eyes overflow with tears, "I didn't mean to run away! I was going to come back! I promise!"

"This isn't your fault," Shadow tries to assure him, "This isn't a punishment."

Silver gives him a pitiful look and just repeats quieter, "I was going to come back..."

"I know," Shadow nods.

Silver looks into Shadow's eyes. He'd known he'd left and allowed him to go anyway because he had faith in him to come back. Silver looks away for a moment before the emotions get too much for him to bare. He runs through the kitchen and slips on the tiles before turning the corner to run up the stairs. His bedroom door slams shut and Shadow allows him his space.

Shadow pulls himself back onto his feet and makes his way over to the living room. He sits down in front of the record player. His things have been rifled through, but it doesn't seem to bother him anymore. He sees a familiar vinyl and pulls it out of its sleeve before setting it down on the turntable. It spins and he places the needle down carefully. The song begins to play at a low hum and Shadow rests his head against the glass sliding door as he looks out at the backyard. The song takes him back to their wedding night and how, for one moment, he managed to be the spark of life in Sonic's life.

The one moment he hadn't caused him pain.

His mind recalls meeting him and all of his wrongdoings that came with it. How Sonic had reformed him and molded him into a better version of himself. How he saw Sonic's vulnerability for the first time. His humble and kind nature shining through. The chaotic, impulsive pull toward him. Through unconfined lust that lulled into genuine love. All of the smiles on Sonic's face. Every morning he'd woken up next to him and kissed his forehead.

He thinks about that and how all of that is gone now. Like holding and smothering a flame. Depriving it of oxygen. He now knows what he'd done was wrong and just how long Sonic had been suffering in silence out of sworn duty. He feels ashamed of himself for being so blind. He wishes he could take it all back. He wishes he wouldn't have held on so tight. Desperately grasping for control and power.

Shadow was Iblis and that's what he'll always remain. Pure fire, destruction in his wake. Burning everything alive and leaving only ash. Just broken memories stay with him.

The record skips. Over and over in a loop. It doesn't correct itself and when Shadow can't take anymore, he just unplugs the machine. Shadow feels for it. Old, worn, but still durable in a way. Built to last beyond its expiration. Yet what good was living past that when he no longer had life or drive left in him.

Sonic wasn't just his life partner or some love. He couldn't be replaced. Nothing could fill the void left behind. It was like losing a part of himself.

A part he knows he'll never get back.

-

There's a tap at Silver's window, but he ignores it.

When there's another and another, he grabs his pillow and thrusts it over his head.

"Go away..." Silver whispers to himself.

There's a soft knock on his window this time and he can hear Jet whisper, "*Siilver!*"

Silver lets out a low growl and whips the pillow off his head. He marches over to the window and points outward as if signaling Jet to leave.

Jet just squints his eyes and asks, "What?"

Silver rolls his eyes and pulls the window open, "I'm not coming out."

"Oh," Jet responds before climbing into his window.

Silver is silently freaking out, "What're you doing!?"

"Well, if you're not going out, I'm coming in," Jet replies like it's simple as he's pulling his board through the window with him.

"No," Silver shakes his head, "You can't be here. Period."

Jet just blinks at him, "Uh... Does it matter? What happened to running away?"

"I..." Silver looks away uncomfortably and whispers, "I can't."

“Sure you can,” Jet snickers as he motions to the window, “Here, I’ll help. Just get on the board and...”

“No, you don’t get it,” Silver emphasizes as he grips the ring on his chest, “I *can’t*.”

Jet raises an eyebrow at him. He makes his way over to Silver and swats his hand away as he examines the ring in his hand, “What is it? Like... a tracker or something?” Jet loops the chain off Silver’s neck and goes to whip it out the window.

“No!!!” Silver rushes over and fights with Jet to grab it again. He carefully puts it back around his neck and cradles it in his hands, “It’s a promise.”

Jet sighs and uses the windowsill as a seat, “What kind of promise?”

“That my father won’t leave me,” Silver says softly with a sniff, “If I lose it...”

Jet just gives him a disgusted look, “Who cares about that old man? He’s a jerk. He won’t even let us be friends.”

“We’re all we got right now,” Silver says with a frown.

Jet grabs Silver’s hand and pulls him toward the window, “You have me and gramps has your dad. It’ll be fine.”

Silver pulls his hand away from Jet’s and wipes the tears away from his eyes, but they keep falling. So, he just covers his face and explains, “My dad is gone. He just... left. I don’t even know where he went. And... and my father promised to always be there for me. I can’t. I *can’t*, Jet. I need to stay here. I can’t leave. B-because... Because... I know how it feels when someone walks out on you. It *hurts*.”

Jet just watches Silver for a minute before saying, “It’s funny because it sounds like you’re saying Sonic left.”

Silver pushes his palms away from his eyes and glares at him, “Yeah, because that’s what I’m telling you.”

Jet folds his arms across his chest, “I don’t believe you. Sonic would never do that.”

Silver gives him a baffled look, “What?”

“Sonic would never do that,” Jet confirms, unmoving.

“So, you don’t believe me?” Silver asks with confusion.

“No, I don’t,” Jet states as he narrows his eyes, “That old man is lying to you.”

“No, he’s not,” Silver says defensively, “My father is a lot of things. He’s cold and mean and he has a temper... he’s kept things from me, but he doesn’t *lie*.”

“Whatever,” Jet rolls his eyes and flips around, sliding back onto his hover board.

“What’re you doing?” Silver asks.

“You told me to leave,” Jet responds with a distant look, “So, that’s what I’m doing. I don’t hang out with people who try to make Sonic look bad.”

“But that’s what *happened*,” Silver growls out like he’s upset Jet doesn’t believe him.

Jet turns sharply to Silver and shouts back with tears in his eyes, “Sonic would never do that! I don’t believe you!” Jet lowers himself back on the ground before darting away, the only thing left behind is the streak of light and the dust that gets picked up by the currents.

Silver slams his fists against the window sill and screams out the window, “Fine! Just be in denial then! See if I care! I hate you!” He slams the window shut and stomps over to his bed before burying his head with his pillow. He screams into the mattress and kicks his feet.

The light flicks on a moment later and Shadow rushes in. He sits on the bed and tries to pull the pillow off from over Silver’s head. “What’s wrong?” Shadow questions in a panic.

Silver finally loses the tug o’ war as the pillow slips out of his hands. He just continues to kick and pound his fists into the mattress as he shouts over and over again, “I hate him! I hate him! I hate him!”

Shadow pushes Silver onto his back and tries to stop him from flailing his limbs wildly. “Silver, stop it,” Shadow orders, but the kid continues on anyway. The moment he goes to retrain him, he stops himself, reeling his hands back. For once, he’s at a loss of what to do. Silver is kicking and screaming and his powers ebb and flash like a lightning storm, but he no idea how to console him. So, he just waits in a silent panic.

It takes awhile, but Silver slowly loses the will to continue and he just lays there, trying to catch his breath through soft sobs. Silver just clenches his teeth as tears overflow in his eyes and his father’s face gets blurry. He blinks the tears away, feeling them hot on his face as he whimpers out, “I-I hate this...”

Shadow gives him a somber look before nodding. He hears the soft whimpers and sobs from the child, but doesn’t say anything. What can he say? Shadow can’t help, but feel as if he’s to blame for this.

Silver rolls away onto his side and continues to wipe away his tears. He’s angry and embarrassed and betrayed in more ways than one. He feels so alone right now.

Shadow looks over at Silver’s back that’s facing him. He carefully lifts his hand, but just as he’s about to place it on the child’s back he retreats it. He doesn’t want to get too close and smother this relationship like he had with Sonic. He’s scared because it’s dawning on him that Sonic has been doing the comforting on Silver’s end. Shadow was the one who had been hurting him.

“Don’t hate him, Silver,” Shadow says softly before lifting himself off the bed, “Hate me.”

He’s about to enter the hallway when he hears the small voice, “Shad-Dad?”

Shadow’s heart squeezes and breaks a little. He hasn’t heard Silver say that since he was really little. He turns and glances back into the room.

“I love you,” Silver murmurs quietly.

“I love you too,” Shadow barely manages to whisper back before carefully closing the door, leaving it cracked open.

He stops when he hears small footsteps behind him. He glances back at Silver who is peaking in through the doorway. Shadow merely walks over to the bed and lifts the comforter up like an invitation.

Silver rushes in and dives under the covers, hiding his whole body under it. A sad smile appears on Shadow's face before he slips under himself. Silver cuddles up closer to him and he allows it. Shadow doesn't touch him, but he does lay on his side facing him.

It's quiet for a long while and Shadow assumes Silver is asleep until he speaks up, "I'll see dad again...right?"

The unsure nature of his voice breaks Shadow's heart a little. "I believe so," Shadow murmurs quietly, "He just needs some time."

Silver smiles a little and whispers, "And then we'll be a family again. Like when you left?"

"This is..." Shadow tries to say, but falls short, "This might be different. Only time will tell."

"But... You'll stay," Silver asks a little nervously, "...right?"

Shadow places a finger on Silver's chest, right over the ring, "I will always come back, Silver. That is my promise to you and I will never break it."

Silver nods, happy with the answer. His eyes slowly get heavy before they finally close.

Shadow watches the child sleep because it's the one thing in his life that is currently keeping him going.



## Ground Zero



### Chapter Twenty-Seven: Ground Zero

They sleep in the next morning and Silver can barely open his eyes when Shadow nudges him awake. He pulls Silver into his arms and heads into the bathroom. He places the kid on the closed toilet seat and opens the cabinet to pull out a tube of toothpaste.

Silver yawns loudly and rubs the sleep out of his eyes, “I had a bad dream...”

“Mh...” Shadow simply acknowledges his statement as he squeezes the toothpaste onto both his and Silver’s toothbrushes before handing the small one to him.

Silver’s lips curl in disgust, “I don’t like that one. Dad usually gives me the bubblegum kind.”

“Take it,” Shadow says a bit firmer.

Silver sighs and does what he’s told. He makes gross-out faces the whole time he’s brushing his teeth. He speaks around his toothbrush, “I had a dream I was in this field and you were there. And...”

Shadow leans into the sink and spits before growling, “Don’t talk with your mouth full.”

Silver quickly finishes brushing his teeth. He rushes over to the sink, on the little step stool, and spits before he tries to continue, “And dad was there too. And...”

Shadow furrows his brow and takes the small toothbrush from Silver, “Open.”

Silver groans and opens his mouth for him.

Shadow leans in and brushes the back teeth. Silver struggles a little, not liking the feeling of it. Shadow continues anyway and responds gruffly, “You need to brush your back teeth as well. If you don’t, you’ll get cavities.”

Silver glares at him, but stops struggling. He allows Shadow to do it, but he’s wincing at the feeling of it.

When he’s done, Shadow points at the sink before rinsing off the toothbrushes. After he sees Silver spit, he grabs one of the rags hanging up and wipes off Silver’s face and straightens out his messy quills.

“Is dad mad at us?” Silver asks, sadly.

Shadow preoccupies himself with fixing Silver’s forehead quills, “He’s mad at *me*.”

“Then, you should apologize,” Silver states, wincing a little feeling a pull at his quills.

“Preoccupy your mind with something else,” Shadow advises him. When he’s done, he turns back toward the mirror. His eyes veer away as he does so though.

Silver takes a moment to think before nodding. He rushes out of the bathroom and down the hall.

Shadow can hear Silver’s little footsteps coming back and the squeak of the mattress. He walks out of the bathroom and back into the bedroom, sitting next to Silver.

Silver is handing Shadow one of the portable gaming systems. He helps Shadow connect it to the wifi so they can play co-op.

It’s a racing game and Shadow isn’t really sure what he’s doing, but he’s steering the small digital cart as best as he can.

Silver wins yet again and Shadow is scratching his head, “I don’t understand. I kept my finger on the acceleration and used the inside of the track the whole time.”

Silver laughs a little points to the screen, “You have to pick up items boxes too though. It’ll give you boosts and weapons that knock other racers off the track.”

“And how is that fair?” Shadow questions like he doesn’t get it.

“It’s fair because everyone is able to pick up items too,” Silver explains as he starts up another race, “Here, let me show you. You can play a tutorial level.”

As Silver begins to set it up, Shadow hears his phone vibrate on the nightstand. He picks it up and says, “Go ahead and get it set up. I need to take this.” He sees the absent nod Silver gives him as he’s engrossed in the game and Shadow makes his way into the hallway before answering, “Hello?”

Topaz’s voice is on the line, “Thank goodness you answered. We need you down at Central City prison ASAP. There was a break in and we need as many men as we can get.”

“Central City prison? I’m a military agent, not a cop. That isn’t my field,” Shadow responds dismissively.

“Not if said criminals are from the Jackal Squad and the prisoner they broke out was former agent Zero,” Topaz explains in a serious tone, “The city is on high alert and we need as many troops as we

can get in case there's a direct assault on the public.”

Shadow’s mouth hangs open for a moment as if he doesn’t know how to respond. He glances back into the bedroom at Silver pressing buttons on his game. In any other situation, he’d be out the door by now, but he has Silver with him and no one to look after him.

“Agent Shadow?” Topaz asks frantically, “Can you hear me?”

“Y-yes,” Shadow replies warily, “I’ll be there as soon as I’m able.”

“Thank you, Shadow,” Topaz says graciously, “I’ll be in touch when you get there.”

Shadow ends the call and holds his head for a moment like he’s trying to rack his brain. Okay, he needed to think rationally about this. The closest one who can take Silver is...Tails. In Mystic Ruins. He dials the number and waits impatiently for the call to go through.

Luckily, Tails answers a moment later, “Hi, Shadow! What’s up?”

“I need you to look after Silver,” Shadow blurts out first chance he can get.

Tails seems surprised by this, “Of course. Isn’t Sonic there to...?”

Shadow doesn’t mean to cut him off, but he doesn’t really have the time, “I’ll fill you in on the details later.”

“Okay,” Tails agrees with a chipper tone, “Just stop by. I’ll be here.”

“Thank you,” Shadow responds with a sigh of relief. He ends the call quickly after without much of a good-bye and calls out to Silver, “Get ready! We need to go!”

Silver looks confused, “Huh? Why?”

“Silver,” Shadow responds with a sharp tone, “Clothes. Shoes. *Now*.”

Silver knows that tone and he scrambles to get to his feet. He rushes into his bedroom and dresses as fast as he can. They both make their way down the stairs and begin to put on their shoes.

Shadow eyes Silver for a moment, seeing that he’s putting his normal shoes on and he redirects him, “Boots.”

Silver stops and gives Shadow a stunned look, “But you said shoes.”

“Boots,” Shadow repeats a bit more sternly this time around.

Silver quickly grabs his boots and nods his head obediently, “Y-yes, sir.”

They’re soon out the door and Shadow locks up. He stops when he sees something metal on the ground and his blood goes cold when he realizes that it’s Sonic’s keys and wedding ring left abandoned on the porch.

“He...came back,” Shadow whispers as he picks up the items in awe. He looks around as if he’s trying to spot him.

“Father!” Silver shouts from the driveway, “I thought we were in a rush!”

Shadow swallows and slips the ring on his finger before grabbing the extra set of keys. Silver is

waiting in front of the car, but Shadow makes a b-line to his bike.

Silver just blinks at him.

“Get on,” Shadow orders.

“Uh...” Silver just nods and tries to climb onto the high seat. Shadow helps him up and Silver sits on it awkwardly, “Is this okay?”

“Yes,” Shadow responds as he gets on and revs the engine, “I need you to hold on.”

Silver feels his bones rattle in his body from the roar of the engine, but he shakily goes to grab onto Shadow anyway. “A-alright,” Silver says, stating he’s done what he was told.

“Very good,” Shadow responds quickly before driving around Sonic’s car and through the grass to get onto the road.

Silver holds on tighter while they’re moving. He’s never seen his father drive so erratically before. He wishes he knew what was going on, but he doesn’t question it because he knows not to. Not right now at least.

Shadow drives at high speeds on the road, swerving around cars and other obstacles. Silver is surprised at how precise and well he’s driving this thing. He’s never been on Shadow’s motorcycle before. He never thought he was allowed. He just holds on tighter when he feels the road under them become sidewalk and then road again when they turn down onto the highway.

“Are you alright?” Shadow asks, not taking his eyes off the road.

“Yes,” Silver replies, not daring to open his eyes.

Shadow nods and takes it. They head toward the coast and Shadow revs the engine one more before blasting energy through his shoes. The engine roars and they take off at top speed behind a sonic boom.

Silver winces a little, but as he averts his eyes he’s looking down at the ocean under them. He slowly looks up in awe as he sees that they were driving on the surface of the water. He gasps and can’t contain himself from saying, “This is amazing!”

“Do not repeat anything I’m doing,” Shadow states, his bike aimed right at the small landmass getting larger and larger in the distance.

“Yes, sir,” Silver responds absently as he looks up at the seagulls flying high above them and passing them up quickly. He glances at the train running just ahead and how the bike speeds by like it isn’t even a contest.

When they reach land again, their speed declines by just a fraction so Shadow can maneuver around the station before skidding to a stop in front of the small workshop. Shadow kicks the kickstand down and picks up Silver before placing him down on the ground.

Silver wavers a little dizzily with a big grin on his face, “Let’s do that again!”

Shadow places a hand on the kid’s back to steady him and guides him to the front door, “Now stay inside and don’t cause any trouble for Miles.” He goes to ring the doorbell, but Tails is already opening the door. “Oh, um...” Shadow says a little awkwardly like he doesn’t know how to begin their conversation.

"I saw you drive up," Tails jokes with him, "There's a huge chunk of sod on my windowsill."

Shadow glances back at his bike and the tracks of uplifted soil, "I apologize."

"I get it. You're in a rush," Tails tells him with a laugh, "Thanks for sparing my porch."

Shadow gently nudges Silver in the door, "If you see Sonic, tell him to contact me." Shadow leaves without much more of an explanation before he gets off his bike and starts to leave.

"Father!" Silver shouts out to him.

Shadow swivels and turns the bike around briefly, locking eyes with Silver. He can see the scared, desperate look that he's giving him. Shadow points to his chest.

Silver slowly lifts his hand to his own and feels the ring hanging there.

Shadow gives him a nod of confirmation before turning back to depart.

Silver squeezes it a bit tighter and tries to calm his nerves. He'll be back. He promised he would.

-

Shadow finally gets around to hooking up the communication device when he arrives on scene and Topaz is already asking him where he's been and why it took so long for him to get there. If it were anyone else, he'd probably hit mute by now.

"I had something to take care of," Shadow responds.

"Something more important than people's lives!?" Topaz retorts.

"A family matter," Shadow states with a bit of heat, "Now if you give me my orders, we won't waste any *more* time than we already have."

Topaz drops it, knowing he's right. "The suspects were last spotted around the downtown area," Topaz informs him, "We need each one of those jackals detained. Do you understand?"

"Yes, I'm on my way," Shadow states before darting off in that direction. Although he slows his pace when he feels his cell going off. It's an unknown number, but he answers it just in case it's Sonic, "Hello?"

"I would like to report a crime at Central City prison," the voice responds with a cunning snicker.

Shadow's face drops a little and he stops his bike, "Zero?"

"You may call me that," Zero states with a calm tone, "My numbers have crept up *a little bit* since we last spoke."

"I'm coming to get you, Zero," Shadow says with a low growl, the threat raw on his tongue.

"You are going the wrong way then," Zero responds in a mocking tone.

Shadow seems confused for a moment before he realizes what he means, "You hacked into the GUN radio frequency."

"No, that is a little above my skill set. Although my squad is leading troops *away* from my location," Zero explains like he's getting bored.

“Why are you telling me this?” Shadow asks, “And since when is it *your* squad?”

“My sights are on you, Shadow. You are my target. Not them. They will just get in the way. Besides, everyone’s demise will come soon enough,” Zero replies confidently, “And... it is my squad because I took out my father. His kills are mine now. I cannot say he has never done anything for me anymore.”

“You can’t trust them, Zero,” Shadow grits out.

Zero lets out a maniacal laugh like it’s far too funny, “Trust? No, I do not trust *anyone*. You have taught me that lesson firsthand. You can only rely on yourself. Others are merely just pawns. If they want to follow me, I will let them...and once I have no more use for them, I will break their skulls, one-by-one, and find great joy in it.”

Shadow cringes at the imagery. “Where are you?” Shadow questions like it’s a demand.

“We have played this game before,” Zero explains with a grin to his voice, “Except, this time, you are one of *my* pawns.” The line goes dead a moment later.

Topaz’s voice comes to life in his ear, “Shadow? Do you read me? Where are you? Your GPS—“

Shadow pulls the mic out of his ear and tosses it to the ground. Fine, if Zero wanted to make this personal, he’d play along. He tracks the phone call and finds that it’s at the beach. The last place they had planned to meet at. He pulls his bike around and heads to the location.

He parks at the pier and makes his way over to the payphone. Zero is waiting for him and Shadow just has to shake his head at him, “Don’t be stupid, Zero. If you just serve your time, you can get out with good behavior.”

“I would have to have good behavior in order to do that,” Zero remarks with a smirk.

Shadow lunges forward and grabs him by the throat as he pushes the jackal against the phone post, “You’re running this operation in the middle of the day with no cover *and* disclosed your location to a government agent.”

“Don’t mistake your position, Shadow. *I* have the upper hand right now,” Zero gasps out, keeping his tone playful.

Shadow releases his grip on Zero, “Where is he?”

Zero coughs and rubs at his neck before laughing, “What do you mean?”

“Sonic,” Shadow demands with a snarl, “Where is Sonic?”

“What? Had you not thrown him under a bus by now?” Zero responds comedically, “That seems to be your signature move.”

“Don’t play dumb with me,” Shadow says, hands crackling with electricity.

Zero takes a moment to admire the energy flowing from Shadow’s fingertips and gives him a look of mock adoration, “Oh, yes... So powerful, yet you latch onto these unnecessary things that make you so *weak*. I had warned you in advance, but here we are.”

“3...”

“Counting? Seriously?”

“2...”

“That’s very generous of you. To tell me when you are going to attack.”

“1...”

“You cannot do it. You do not have it in you--!”

It’s a split second and a flash where a shoe digs itself into the back of Zero’s head, causing him to fall flat into the sand. A white gloved hand pulls up his head and he’s face-to-face with Sonic the Hedgehog, “Yo, tell your goons to lay off the city!”

Shadow is giving the blue hero a baffled look, “Sonic?”

Sonic’s head snaps up when he sees Shadow and he’s just as surprised to see him, “Sh-Shadow?”

Zero takes that moment of shock to his advantage and strikes a blow of his own to Sonic, kneeling him right in the gut. Sonic pushes him off and Shadow grabs Zero by the shoulders. “Thank you, Shadow, for breaking my fall,” Zero snickers, but Shadow grabs his arm and tosses him over his shoulder, onto the ground.

Zero growls and twists his legs around, kicking Shadow in return. The dark hero falls back into Sonic’s arms and Zero takes turns beating Shadow’s face and then Sonic’s.

Sonic gets angry and when Shadow blocks one of the punches, Sonic uses Shadow’s shoulders to brace himself as he flips over him. Sonic spins and sends a kick right to his face.

Zero falters back a little and holds his nose, seeing the small hint of blood, “Ah, Sonic the Hedgehog. A bit more agile than I would have imagined.”

Sonic looks a little lost when he looks back at Zero before just straight up laughing at him, “Do I know you? Are you asking for an autograph or...?”

Zero snarls in anger and unsheathes his sword as darts forward with a slash, “The moment I kill you is the moment *everyone* will know my name!!!”

Shadow rushes in, his inhibitor ring clanging against the blade before he kicks the jackal away from the blue hero.

Sonic just breathes a sigh of relief at that because this guy was a lot faster than he expected him to be, “Nice save.”

There’s a small cut on the back of Shadow’s hand, but he ignores it for the time being, “Just stay focused.”

Sonic nods back as the two hedgehogs stand before Zero.

Zero snarls because he would have gotten Sonic hadn’t Shadow got in his way. Zero kicks the sand up before leaping in the air and descending down sword-first.

Shadow sees the sword through the dust of sand at the last minute and kicks his foot up to block it. He can feel the blade scrape at the bottom of his shoe, clashing at the mechanical components of it.

Sonic sends Zero a few blows when the sand clears and attempts to help Shadow back up onto his feet before being punched in the face. Sonic winces as the sting of it radiates up his cheek and he sends a punch of his own back. “Man, this guy’s rough,” Sonic comments with a hiss.

“That’s Zero,” Shadow quietly responds before his hand lights up with energy and he charges at Zero once more.

“Oh,” Sonic states like he’s having an epiphany. He murmurs to himself right after, “...Explains why he hits like a brick wall.” Anyone being trained by Shadow would.

“Chaos Spear!” Shadow shoots with precision, locking onto Zero’s movements.

Zero tumbles out of the way and as the shots hit the sand, they turn into glass. Zero kicks it right into Shadow and it shatters on impact.

Shadow winces, not taking into consideration the new set in terrain.

“That looked like it hurt,” Zero mocks him.

Shadow growls and curls his hands into fists. He needed to be careful when using his chaos energy now. Anything that doesn’t hit can be used as a projectile against at him.

Sonic pulls Shadow back onto his feet and stands next to him with a smirk, “Do it again. I’ll knock it right back at him.”

Shadow looks like he doesn’t like that plan, but he nods anyway. He shoots a few more, knowing Zero is nimble enough to dodge them.

Zero sends a solid kick at three of the glass structures in front of him, sending them straight for Shadow. He gasps when he sees Sonic appear in front of Shadow and knocking them back with a spin dash. Zero goes to run, but the first one smacks him right in the back. He falls forward onto his knees before the last two hit and he’s fast first on the ground.

Sonic raises his fists in the air, “Home run! And the crowd goes wild!” Sonic rushes over to Zero and grabs him by the back of the neck, “Sweet! That was easy. Call a wagon, Shads, and let’s put this clown back in a jail cell where he belongs.”

Shadow cringes at Sonic’s choice of words, “Sonic, wait...”

Zero swings his hand behind himself and grabs a hold of Sonic’s arm, pulling him down with him. He smirks as Sonic tries to get his footing under the sandy ground and Zero applies just enough pressure onto his back stop his squirming. He pulls Sonic back onto his feet and lifts his blade up to the blue hero’s throat.

Zero presses his face into Sonic’s neck and revels in how Sonic tries to move his head away. Zero’s eyes don’t leave Shadow’s as he says, “Perhaps I shall call a mortician instead so I can put you six feet under where *you* belong.”

Shadow holds his hands out in nervous surrender, “Zero, don’t do this...”

“Ah... You are singing a significantly different tune now, are you not? It is good that you are aware of how the situation is out of your control,” Zero explains as he inches the blade a bit closer to Sonic’s throat. He nuzzles into Sonic’s neck and breathes in deeply, “Oh yes, what a wonderful scent. Your fear is delicious.”

“As if I’m afraid of you,” Sonic react with anger as he tries to knock away from Zero’s face, “Also buy me dinner first, you weird-o.”

Shadow’s brow furrows by what he’s seeing. Sonic has no idea what Zero is capable of. He wishes



he could tell Sonic to stop struggling. He doesn't know what to do.

"What do you want, Zero," Shadow asks quickly, "You must want something if you're doing this."

"What I want..." Zero murmurs as if he's thinking it over. He stops Sonic's struggling and pulls the hero's head back by the quills so Shadow has a full view of his throat, "I wanted one thing. Your blood on the sand, but this nuisance got in the way of my fun. So, I will find great pleasure in watching you crumble in despair as I desecrate the one thing you are trying to protect."

Fear shines in his eyes. He slowly inches forward and he sees Zero inching back. "Take me instead, please," Shadow pleads.

A satisfied smirk crosses Zero's face as he responds, "Are you, a god, actually *begging*? Oh, Shadow. How the mighty have fallen." He motions under him, "Get on the ground. At least commit to it."

Shadow just looks at him as if to ask if he's serious.

"Now," Zero shouts, jolting at Shadow's senses.

Shadow lets out a breath of air and slowly nods. Shadow lowers down to one knee and bows his head.

Zero laughs and makes his way forward as he presses his foot against Shadow's head. He forces Shadow down and scrubs the bottom of his sole on the back of his head, "You only have your own weakness to blame. If you would not have latched onto something so trivial, you would be able to see the light of another day."

"Just let him go," Shadow says in defeat, not having it in him to fight.

Zero lets out a thoughtful noise, "I don't know... Should I? I guess it does not matter one way or another. Everyone and everything will perish by the time I am through with it." There's a flash of blue light and suddenly the blue hedgehog is out of his grip, "What!?"

Sonic appears under Zero, hands braced on the beach as one leg whips up and collides with the jackal's jaw. As he's dazed, Sonic pins him down, legs securely around Zero's arms as he forces his face in the sand.

Shadow is just about to call for back up when he hears the siren in the distance.

"Man, he's a fighter..." Sonic grit out. Zero is struggling and trying to push him off, Sonic beginning to lose the fight, "Shadow! Help!"

Shadow gets up and feels the anger boiling in his chest. "Get off," Shadow orders as he takes over. He flips Zero over onto his back and pins him down before punching Zero in the face over and over. He can hear his heart hammering in his skull as each jab strikes him. Zero's blood streaking the sand with each blow.

He doesn't see the look of forfeit nor the blood. All he sees is red and the uncontrollable urge to just beat the ever living hell out of him. He'd almost killed Sonic. He'd almost taken him away. Permanently. He was going to make him *watch*.

Once the first police cars pull up, Sonic is trying to pull Shadow off. Shadow struggles before eventually stopping, but not before giving Zero one more good kick in the ribs. He's done. He's done feeling bad for him or trying to help him. Zero is just garbage along with others who dared to

challenge him. He feels not one shred of sympathy for him anymore.

He sees Zero slowly open his one good eye to gaze up at him and Shadow just turns away like he isn't even worth his time, "Worthless... Don't show your pathetic face around me ever again."

Zero lifts a shaky arm as a scowl crosses his battered face, but he doesn't have the strength to even move. A group of men come to cuff him and haul him off a moment later.

Topaz approaches him quickly after and he doesn't catch everything she says. Only that they're relocating Zero to Prison Island because he's a higher threat to the public now. His nerves are buzzing under his skin and his heart is drumming too loudly in his ears. He doesn't even care anymore.

Shadow just stands where he is. A few of the marked vehicles stay and others leave. Omega makes his way over to Shadow and he hears Sonic say, "Hey, you finally made it. Thanks for that tip about the beach."

"Yes, my satellite voice recognition software is unmatched," Omega responds as proudly as a robot physically can, "Although I am unsatisfied about arriving so late. I would have liked to get in on some of the action as well."

"Maybe next time, big guy," Sonic snickers as he pats Omega's metal arm. Sonic stops when he sees Shadow walking down the coastline, away from everyone else. "I'll be right back, okay 'Meggy?'" Sonic says before running off toward Shadow.

Omega's gears whirl when he hears the nickname. He hasn't been called that since Silver was really little and had given it to him.

"Shads!" Sonic calls out to him, "Hey, Shads! Wait up!"

Shadow reluctantly stops and allows Sonic to catch up.

Sonic finally meets up with him and he asks, "You okay?"

"I lost control... I..." Shadow whispers before sighing. He shakes his head, not wanting to bother Sonic with his problems. Instead, he keeps his distance, slipping the ring off his finger and hands Sonic's belongings back to him, "Here."

"Oh," Sonic swallows before carefully taking his keys and ring, "Yeah... right..."

It's really quiet between them and they both wonder if there's anything left that needed to be said.

Shadow takes them both by surprise when he asks, "You were with GUN?"

"Um..." Sonic fiddles his fingers a little, "Not originally, no. I was just hanging out when I saw all the commotion and thought it'd be fun to help out." Sonic frowns when it gets quiet again and he hesitantly asks, "So, Silver is...?"

"With your brother," Shadow responds right away.

Sonic nods, "Right."

The sound of waves take over again.

Sonic rubs the back of his neck nervously before feeling the need to speak, "Sorry I made you worry. I would have teleported away earlier, but I used a ton of energy going from downtown to

here.”

Shadow nods quietly.

“How’s Silver doing?” Sonic asks awkwardly.

Shadow turns his head away and feels the emotions overflowing inside him, “Don’t ask me that right now.”

Sonic swallows when he hears the vulnerability in his voice. He deflates a little and also turns away, feeling guilt weighing down on him.

“You came back,” Shadow whispers.

Sonic opens his mouth, but he doesn’t really know what to say. He looks down at the ring in his hand and curls his fingers around it. “Yeah... kind of... I...” Sonic sighs and shakes his head, “I couldn’t tell you what I’m doing right now. I came back about a dozen times. I just couldn’t bring myself to walk in the front door. I don’t know if I’m really welcome there anymore.”

Shadow turns, giving Sonic a bitter and confused look.

Sonic takes a step back because a tear slips down Shadow’s face, but Shadow wipes it away as quickly as it comes.

“How could you say something as idiotic as that?” Shadow questions sternly.

Sonic just shrugs, “I dunno? I mean... I...”

Shadow marches up to Sonic and grabs him roughly by the arms and he growls out, “I have a child *begging* for you to come home and you’re questioning whether you’re welcome there or not!?”

“I...” Sonic tries to say, but he feels the tears gathering at the corners of his eyes, “...yes?”

Shadow is just looking at him like he doesn’t understand his logic.

Sonic panics. He doesn’t know what to do or say. Shadow’s eyes look so desperate and his mouth looks so familiar. He just acts on instinct and grabs Shadow’s face, pressing their lips together. He’s reeled in by Shadow’s arms and he falls into a lulling state of warmth and comfort before he realizes what he’s doing. He pulls away from Shadow and places his hand on his mouth, “I didn’t mean to do that! *Fuck*, I didn’t mean to do that! We shouldn’t be doing that!”

Shadow’s hand hovers over Sonic’s hip. He desperately wants to pull him in and kiss him again, but it falls away. No, this was Sonic’s decision. He had to respect it.

“Agent Shadow,” Omega’s voice states as the robot trudges through the sand, “The commander has issued us to finish the job downtown.”

“Right,” Shadow responds with a nod. He begins to walk off, but stops, “You have a key for a reason.” That’s all he says before walking with Omega back toward the streets.

“You did not reciprocate the kiss,” Omega points out.

“Focus on the mission, Omega,” Shadow states with anger as he gets on his bike, “There’s a squad of jackals that mean to do harm to civilians.”

“Kill on sight?” Omega questions in an overzealous manner, his arms transforming into automatic

weapons.

Shadow nods in confirmation, "Kill on sight."

Omega turns his head to look at Shadow as if to ask if he's serious. When he doesn't get a response and Shadow heads out onto the streets on his bike, Omega's legs fold inward and wheels appear under him as he follows behind Shadow obediently.

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The mission takes all night, but luckily the city seems pretty foreign to the jackals and Shadow and Omega are able to track and locate each one. Or perhaps it's because Shadow is no longer afraid of them and is out for blood. Either way, they take them down and what remains is taken away in body bags. Shadow wants to make damn sure nothing like this happens again. He's beyond tired of these missions.

After the last one is counted for and collected, Shadow gets on his bike. It's late and he hopes Silver hadn't stayed up on his account. He's about to leave when he hears his name being called and he growls distastefully, not caring who hears.

Espio and Vector make their way over and Shadow sits back in his seat with his arms folded over his chest, "Could you make this quick? I've been out here for more than 15 hours and I want to actually want to go home for once."

Espio bows to him respectfully, clearly apologetic for their rude interruption. Although Vector doesn't read the air at all, "Yeah, well, I feel ya owe us a little bit of your time. Had GUN taken care of this over at Prison Island we wouldn't have to be here now cleaning up your mess!"

Espio raises his head before adding quietly, "I believe you also have other reasons for owing us a small portion of your time."

Shadow rolls his eyes. He gets the hint. He sabotaged their investigation and probably caused a mess and a half on their end. He shuts off his bike and kicks the kickstand down, leaning against it impatiently. He motions for them to continue.

"Thank you," Espio says politely before getting to business, "The security cameras at the prison have captured something quite peculiar. Apparently one of the jackals had switched places with Zero at one point, yet they still staged it to seem like they had broken him out."

Shadow sighs and nods, "Probably to keep GUN off his trail. He wanted to meet with me personally."

"What exactly would they need Zero for?" Espio asks.

Shadow knew this was going to bite him in the ass sooner or later. He pulls out the memory chip from its hiding place in his glove and hands it to Espio. When the chameleon gives him a confused look, he states, "Recorded footage of the day Zero killed the former leader. It's Omega's memory bank."

Espio gives him a sharp look.

"Yes, I know... You were right," Shadow murmurs reluctantly, "About everything."

Espio sighs and hooks the memory chip onto his notepad. He gives Shadow an exasperated look before simply asking, "Why?"

“I wanted to change him,” Shadow hates himself for admitting it.

“Well... you were successful on that end,” Espio responds, “You gave him the proper tools to execute his own plans.”

“Yeah, you created a *monster*,” Vector blurts out.

Espio holds a calm hand up to his partner, “Hush.”

Vector turns away and pouts, “Well, it’s true.”

“What have I told you about making the people we’re questioning uncomfortable?” Espio tries to reason.

“No,” Shadow shakes his head, “He’s right.” This is everything he’s afraid of.

“Shadow,” Espio frowns and steps forward, “Do not be so hard on yourself. What you did was out of good intentions. It’s just... Zero was off from the very beginning. His honesty was genuine, but his aura... it was unsettling.”

Shadow disregards Espio’s words. He motions toward the memory chip and says, “There’s evidence of Zero stating that the leader’s kills were now his kills. It’s the reason why the Jackal Squad sided with him in the end. Zero wasn’t working with them. He was running the entire operation.”

Espio closes his eyes and smiles because he can feel Shadow’s aura light and pure with honesty. “Thank you for your cooperation, Shadow,” Espio says with appreciation.

“If there are no further questions, I’d like to go now,” Shadow informs them as he starts up his bike once more.

“There is one final question,” Espio pipes up over the engine, “What changed your mind?”

“Don’t ask questions you already know the answer to,” Shadow remarks with a snarl, “You were the one who warned me that Sonic’s life was in danger.” With that, Shadow leaves.

Admitting he was wrong is one of the most awful feelings in the world. He did owe it to Espio though and he’s learned to trust his word from now on.

Shadow leaves his bike at home and makes his way back to Tails’ place via train. He’s tired. He almost wonders if it would be alright if he took a small nap there or not. His eyes slowly droop, but his stop is being called next so he stands up and waits impatiently. There’s barely any passengers this late at night and he’s thankful for that.

When the doors open, he hides a small yawn against his hand and gets off. He heads toward the workshop and opens the door, but it’s snagged on something. Shadow carefully peers inside and sees Silver sleeping on the doormat.

Shadow gives the kid a disheartened look before slipping inside with the small amount of room he has. He carefully picks Silver up and he sees him open his golden yellow eyes just a fraction. Shadow hushes him much like he used to when he was a small child and his eyes fall shut again.

“You came back...” Silver whispers, sleepily.

Shadow lays down on the couch and sets Silver down on the inside so he doesn’t fall off. He places a finger to the ring against the kid’s chest like a reminder.

Silver smiles dreamily and begins to snore softly, falling back into sleep.

“Goodnight, Silver,” Shadow whispers before placing a gentle kiss against his forehead and settling down himself.

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